

May 17, 1945

**Documents Section, Captured Personnel and
Material Branch, Report No. 127, enclosing a
Translation of a Polish Report Made by Lt. Col.
Stefan Mossor on April 21, 1943 on the Katyn Woods
Atrocities**

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Summary:

This translated document is an eye witness account and summary of a visit Stefan Mossor made to the mass graves in Katyn while he was a German POW.

Original Language:

English

Contents:

Original Scan

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✓ Report No. 127

17 May 1945

DOCUMENTS SECTION
Captured Personnel and Material Branch

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The following is a translation of a Polish report (captured in German material) made by Lt. Col. Stefan Mossor on the Katyn Woods atrocities in which some 10 - 12 thousand Polish officers are alledged to have been executed by the Russians. Col. Mossor was a Polish P/W in Germany captivity at the time and submitted this account to the Commander of his internment Camp, II E/K, after visiting the scene at Katyn Woods, near Smolensk, in company with six other Polish officers. The report was for distribution solely to Polish officer prisoners.

George N. Prince
GEORGE N. PRINCE
1st Lt., Inf.

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Lt. Col. dipl. Stefan Mossor
Neubrandenburg, 21 IV 1943

To the Commander of Camp II E/K
W/M

As I have already reported to Mr. Pulkownik on 14 IV, at 1900, I received an order that same day at 1830 to prepare myself for a journey but would return to camp within a few days.

On the morning of the 15th, I and Capt. Cylkowski of Camp II E/B travelled by train to Szczecina and from there proceeded to Berlin by fast train with several other officers from Camp II C and II D. The destination of the journey was given us neither in Neubrandenburg nor in Szczecina.

In the Prisoner of War Office (Berlin, Schlieffenufer 7) we found General Jan Chmurowicz and Capt. Adamski. In all there were 8 Polish officers assembled in the office, ranging from Brigadier General to 2nd Lieutenant, namely:

1. Brigadier General Chmurowicz	Oflag II C
2. Lt. Col. dipl. Stefan Mossor	Oflag II E/K
3. Major Aleksander Nowosielski	Oflag II C
4. Capt. Stanislaw Cylkowski	Oflag II E/B
5. Capt. Konstanty Adamski	Oflag II C
6. Capt. Bugenjusz Kleban	Oflag II D
7. 2nd Lt. Pilot Zbigniew Rowinski	Oflag II C
8. 2nd Lt. Stanislaw Gostkowski	Oflag II D

General Chmurowicz informed us that he had received information from the OKW in the afternoon stating that we were to take a plane to Smolensk on the following morning and that he had replied immediately that it would be impossible for him to travel by plane because of Stwierdzona who had heart trouble and was still in camp in Murnau.

At 2300 the OKW telephoned that because of the rapid decomposition of the corpses of Polish officers exposed on the ground, the journey could neither be set aside nor could it be made by train. Therefore, General Chmurowicz was relieved of the trip and I, as senior ranking officer, had the task of getting the officers ready to leave by plane at 0700, arranging for provisions for all etc.

At 0700, the next day, 16 IV, a representative, Capt. Dr. Bentmann, arrived by automobile. I gave him the following statement, orally, repeated it next in Smolensk and then, once again, upon our return to Berlin.

a) According to the order, we are not to be considered as representatives or delegates of Polish Ps/W, nor do we feel authorized to make any public statement; however, we are prepared to bring to the attention of all Polish officer prisoners the real state which we shall confirm at the scene (because of a real interest in the fate of our colleagues.).

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b) That all other statements are not for us, as Ps/W, to make but rather for the organization of the International Red Cross, representatives of the international press, etc.

c) That in connection with the above, we demand protection from all kinds of inquiries by the press and radio, from photographers, cameramen, etc.

In reply, Capt. Dr. Bentmann gave me to understand that upon our arrival in Smolensk we would not be required to make any sort of statement nor would film be made; however, a few photographs exclusively for the archives of the OKW were certain to be made there...

He guaranteed me, on his word of honor, that my report, made for the Commander of Oflag II E/K, would be held exclusively for the information of P/W Polish officers of other camps in the most literal sense.

In spite of the fact that my conditions were agreed to, the word "delegation" was used, in reference to us, by some radio station on the 18th (at 20 00) and in the "Pommersche Zeitung" on the 19th (No. 291). (Abordnung or "der Fuehrer der Abordnung"). There may have been some misunderstanding because of the urgency of the information as, in this same week, 18 IV, "Berliner Nachtausgabe" carried the exact story, that "Einige polnische Kriegsgefangenen Offiziere, welche nach Katyn zugefuehrt wurden" --- etc. (Several Polish officers, Ps/W, were taken to Katyn...)

The remainder of the trip pursued the following course:

On 16 IV at 0810, we left from Stankan airport in Junkers (Ju 52) transports. The weather was not too advantageous for flying because of a strong wind which forced us to keep close to the ground (20 - 80 meters). We landed immediately in Warsaw, at Okęcie, where we stayed about an hour for refueling. Major Nowosielski suffered a severe heart attack en route from Berlin to Warsaw and we were obliged to leave him there under local guard at Okęcie airport. We removed him 2 days later, returning him to Berlin by plane.

We landed in Smolensk at 1530 - and were quartered near the middle of town in the M.P. building, being under their supervision.

In the evening we were visited by the director of the work of exhumation, an officer of the M.P. (Lt. Sloventschnik) who acquainted us with the history of the discovery of the bodies (by Polish workmen) and left us, over-night, copies of statements made by witnesses, lists of the first exhumations, of identified corpses etc.

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On 17 IV at 0830 we drove out to the area of exhumation at Katyn Woods. I include as inclosure No. 1 a free-hand, and therefore inexact, sketch of this terrain drawn at the scene.

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Katyn Woods is located not far from the railroad station of Gniezdow (about 20 km to the West of Smolensk) on a sandy wooded trail which joins the highway with the GPU rest home, situated on the Dnepr.

Our Principal Observations (agreed upon before returning to the camps by all 6 officers present at the scene):

1) Condition of the corpses:

The corpses were badly decomposed, partially mummified (desiccation in dry, powdery sand, no ground-water before a depth of 3 meters). Facial features especially unrecognizable (eyes, eyelids and nostrils destroyed, mouths open either from crying out or from agony, lips convulsed and contracted or generally destroyed, teeth barred). However, documents, papers, decorations, buttons, orders, regimental insignia, etc. are all plain marks of identification. Reference is made here to the upper and consequently the best identified of the layers of corpses, i.e. those already dug up and laid out on the forest moss; however, the layers which were exhumed later, especially those deeper down, having lain in the ground-water, will be much less readily recognizable and much more difficult to identify.

Documents, photographs, cigarette-cases and money removed from the pockets of uniforms and boots of the upper layer of corpses are all perfectly recognizable, in part very well (it is often possible to read the date of the postal cancellation on letters with the naked eye). Print of all kinds is easily recognizable and legible. However, letters written in ink are badly blurred and often illegible (they have to be enlarged and read with the aid of chemicals). Polish paper money of no real circulation value is lying about everywhere in a soiled condition and especially documents for the identification of the corpses are unrecognizable for this same reason. They were simply thrown on the ground.

2) Condition of the uniforms:

The disintegration of the uniforms parallels the decomposition of the bodies. If one may so express it, the uniforms "fit" the corpses skin-tight, in part actually adhering to them, and somewhat shrunken into the form given them by the position of the members of the body.

Shoe leather (pig-hide) is well-preserved. The soles of some boots are ruined -- holes and other damage in places. The bottoms are fastened to the tops with wooden shoe-nails and the shoes are reinforced on the top with bands taken from Polish gas masks.

3) The cut of the uniforms, shoes (English type Niedzinski), kinds of decorations, principal belts, insignia etc. even among the deepest visible layer are without doubt Polish. This can easily be substantiated if, for instance, one takes the boots of those not yet exhumed which protrude at the end of the excavations.

4) The period of time the corpses have lain in the ground can be determined with exactness only by scientific methods (state of decomposition of the corpses at a given depth, age of the pine-trees planted to hide the surface, etc.). The scientific work at the place of exhumation is under the direction of a professor of Medical Law from the University of Wrocław, Prof. Dr. Buhtz. The findings from this work have

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not yet been made public. The layman can orient himself meanwhile only by the statements of witnesses who observed the commands of sentence at the scene, by dates of the latest lists, notations in diaries etc.

5) Total number of corpses. The German authorities estimate the total number of Polish corpses in Katyn Woods at 10 - 12 thousand. They make their estimation on the following basis:

a) Probable total surface of the mass grave

Four excavations (1,2,3,4, on the inclosed sketch) were dug at the most likely points where the old land was disturbed. A thick layer of corpses was found in all of them. The present excavation is a new one (No. 5 on the sketch) which had not yet been finished at the time of our visit. Since, (as we saw for ourselves) heads, arms, and legs protrude from the walls of excavations 1 - 4, the German director of the work (Lt. Slowentschik) counts on the possibility that the entire space between 1 - 4 can be one large mass grave. All the more so, as the age and kinds of bushes and pines in this whole area is the same. If only part of the middle space should prove to be an interior continuation of 1 - 4, in view of the thickness of the layer buried there, it would yield thousands of corpses.

b) Thickness of the layer of corpses

At the time of our visit to excavations 1-- 4, only one upper layer had been examined and they had been layed out on the surface of the ground. These numbered 301 corpses. Under the upper layer, as we confirmed, there lies a thick stratum of corpses, without a separating layer of sand or earth, laid in disorder one on the other. In order to measure the depth of this layer without the necessity of removing all of them, (technically impossible because of the rapidity of decomposition), the director of the work ordered that kinds of vertical galleries be dug thru the middle rows of the excavations. After my arrival, they came upon ground-water in these more than 2 meters from the upper surface of the layer of corpses or 2 - 3.5 meters from the surface of the earth. Digging the galleries, workmen counted 12 layers of corpses as far as the ground-water and it was feared that there were still more bodies in the water. While we were present, 2 galleries were covered with fine sand. According to personal observation, we found, with the galleries in this condition, that there is a visible thickness of a layer of corpses of about 1.5 meters.

It is difficult to state our opinion of the layers. The impression is rather of a tremendous case of pressed dates. The corpses lie upon each other lengthwise, across and obliquely, in the most varied positions, just as they fell or were thrown into the pit. Arms, legs, and heads are piled up here and there in the most amazing confusion.

c) Reckoning by the amount of available transportation.

The amount of available transportation according to all the witnesses. They say that in March and April 1940, when these executions were carried out, 3 - 4 transports of 3 - 4 cars of arrested persons, loaded with Polish officers (among whom were some civilians) arrived at the Gniezdow station from Smolensk daily (not every day but in all about 28 days). These people were taken from the station by 3 heavy GPU trucks (the so-called "Black Hawks") to Katyn Woods. These trucks returned 10 times daily. Witnesses questioned by us confirmed these statements.

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- 1) Pits (relatively speaking, each one is a large pit) are in the full meaning of this word mass graves and contain thousands of troops.
- 2) Exact numbers must be established after the final exhumation of all the corpses.

(Trans. note: There are no Nos. 3,4,5, in the text.)

- 6) The number identified up until the present

Of the first upper layer (301 bodies), 158 could be identified (attached list) among them Generals Smorawiński and Bohatyrewicz. The remainder are people not possessing any documents -- are either officers (in Polish uniforms) with foreign epaulettes (it is impossible to ascertain the rank) or civilians (in this layer about 2 - 3 %).

- 7) Types of deaths

In the case of all corpses seen by us (skulls of these were not hidden by covering of skin or hair, or were cleaned at our request), the skulls had been pierced by revolver bullets of a heavy caliber. The bullet entered almost regularly at the back of the base of the skull and left the head variously, through the forehead, the temples, the eye-sockets -- according to the position of the head at the time of the shot.

Some corpses had their hands tied behind them with strong but thin cord, cutting through the flesh and tendons to the bone. The hands in these cases are cramped and crossed. Every corpse dug up during the presence of the Polish officers there had similar bullet holes in the skulls and hands bound in the same manner.

I observed exactly similar details on the opposite side of the sand road where a large surrounding area of old Russian corpses begins. Professor Buhtz estimates them to have lain in the ground from 5 to 8 years, depending on the surrounding area.

- 8) Documents:

Near most of the corpses (in pockets and boots) are found a considerable number of papers of identification, photographs, postcards, etc. -- as I have mentioned already -- all well-preserved.

- a) Preservation of the documents. They have been placed on the veranda of the forester's house used by the Commission for Exhumation (sketch) in large, ventilated crates, covered with glass, where they are drying until time for evaluation and eventual return to the relatives.

- b) Post cards. Correspondence - almost exclusively mail from Poland - all addressed to a camp of Polish prisoners in Kozielsk. The latest dates sent (from Poland) are January - February 1940.

- c) Diaries

Laconic notes written in the dated spaces of diaries were found on two of the dead. In each case these notes are carried up to the 1st of January 1940 (in Kozielsk), in another, (2nd Lt. Res. Jan Bartys, Assistant of Financial Control in Cracow), they have also been brought up to the 15th III 40 in Kozielsk. The last entry in this diary (3 pages), is illegible from the dampness (having been nearest the body), have been treated by a chemical process and deciphered. They are touching, simple and sad.

- d) The documents of Gen. Smorawiński were all sent to Smolensk for photographing. It was made possible for me, as the proper person, to view these. (Beside the P.K.O. Lublin book and other documents) I found the military pass of General Smorawiński, not mentioned on the list, in a good state of preservation. Photos in it are lacking (either being stuck

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together or lost); however, completely distinct are: signature, first and last name, decorations, 2 final orders (Division and D.O.K. Lublin). Besides this, a silver cigarette case with a gold illegible inscription. The stripes on General Smorawiński's breeches are a distinct blue, the insignia of a Brigadier General. General Bohatyrewicz's stripes were clearly visible but entirely wet through.

I examined the cigarette case of Col. Żeliszewski, Kasimierz, which has a dedication from the three commanders of the regiments and the commander of the D.A.C. Brigade of Cracow. The cigarette case is of silver, black with tarnish, has enamelled lances and a completely legible inscription. I did not see the corpse; Col. Żeliszewski was lying somewhere in the middle of the field. Because of the noxious odor, I decided not to continue the inquiry.

9) Marking

All corpses after exhumation and eventual identification receive a consecutive number around the neck. This number corresponds to the numbers on the identification list and to the numbers of the documents.

10) Probable time necessary for exhumation

This work will probably last a long time, all the more so, as it will have to be suspended during the warm weather. Delegates of the Polish Red Cross will be used in the office of identification where they will be working constantly with the documents. According to what we were told, the Polish Red Cross will be given the task of the arrangement of the common grave.

11) The representative of the OKW informed us that each new list of the identified will be immediately released for the information of the Polish people and Polish Ps/W.

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On 17 IV 45 at 1340 we returned to Berlin by the same plane, picking up Major Nowosielski again in Warsaw. We spent the night at the airport in Poznań. After arriving in Berlin, we returned to our former camps under escort.

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Finally, I report to Mr. Pułkownik, that:

a) I alone, bear the responsibility for the contents of this report as senior officer of those visiting the scene and, as such, the spokesman throughout the course of the whole journey for my junior officers.

b) At our inquiry why officers from all P/W camps were not sent to the scene, or at least from each military district, we were told that because of the rapid decomposition of the corpses in the open air, officers of the Szczeciński Corps were sent as being situated closest to Berlin and having the best railroad connection. Besides the transport of such a large number of officers by planes would constitute a real technical difficulty; on the other hand, movement of trains, over-loaded in time of war and, particularly, on the lines to the front, requires extreme limitation.

(-) MOSSOR STEFAN
Lt. Colonel

2 Inclosures

1. Sketch of Katyn Woods
2. 1st list of identified Polish Officers.

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