



£1

The Stalin Society

BM Box 2521 London WC1N 3XX

Tel/Fax 020 8571 9723

The Katyn Massacre

by Ella Rule

Presentation to the Stalin Society, July 2002

The Stalin Society

The aim of the Stalin Society is to defend Stalin and his work on the basis of fact and to refute capitalist, revisionist, opportunist and Trotskyist propaganda directed against him.

The activity of the Society includes (a) the study of and research upon his writings and actions; (b) the translation of material on these subjects into and from other languages; (c) the publication of material relating to such study and research; (d) the celebration and commemoration of important occasions in Stalin's life; (e) the establishment of contact with other groups and individuals with a view to taking a common stand on issues and the joint organisation of future activities; (f) the establishment of contact with similar societies and groups abroad with a view to mutual benefit from experience and collaboration.

For further information, contact us at:

BM Box 2521, London WC1N 3XX Tel/Fax 020 8571 9723

The Katyn Massacre

by Ella Rule

At the end of the First World War, the boundary between Russia and Poland was settled as being along a line which became known as the Curzon line – Lord Curzon being the British statesman who had proposed it.

This demarcation line was not to the liking of the Poles, who soon went to war against the Soviet Union in order to push their borders further eastward. The Soviet Union counter-attacked and were prepared not only to defend themselves but, against Stalin's advice, to liberate the whole of Poland. Stalin considered such an aim to be doomed to failure because, he said, Polish nationalism had not yet run its course. The Poles were determined NOT to be liberated so there was no point in trying. Hence the Poles put up fierce resistance to Soviet advances. Ultimately the Soviet Union was forced to retreat and even cede territory to the east of the Curzon line to Poland. The areas in question were Western Byelorussia and the western Ukraine – areas populated overwhelmingly by Byelorussians and Ukrainians respectively rather

than by Poles. The whole incident could not but exacerbate the mutual dislike of the Poles and the Russians.

On 1 September 1939, Nazi German invaded Poland. On 17 September, the Soviet Union moved to reoccupy those parts of Poland that lay east of the Curzon line. Having taken over those areas, the Soviet Union set about distributing land to the peasants and bringing about the kind of democratic reforms so popular with the people and so unpopular with the exploiters. During the battle to retake the areas east of the Curzon line, the Soviet Union captured some 10,000 Polish officers, who became prisoners of war. These prisoners were then held in camps in the disputed area and put to work road building, etc.

Two years later, on 22 June 1941, Nazi Germany attacked the Soviet Union by surprise. The Red Army was forced hurriedly to retreat and the Ukraine was taken over by the Germans. During this hurried retreat it was not possible to evacuate to the Soviet interior the Polish prisoners of war. The chief of camp no. 1, Major Vetoshnikov gave evidence that he had applied to the chief of traffic of the Smolensk section of the Western Railway to be provided with railway cars for the evacuation of the Polish prisoners but was told it was unlikely to be possible. Engineer Ivanov, who had been the Chief of Traffic in the region at the time, confirmed there had been no railway cars to spare. "*Besides,*" he said, "*we could not send cars to the Gussino line, where the majority of the Polish prisoners were, since that line was already under fire*". The result was that, following the Soviet retreat from the area, the Polish prisoners became prisoners of the Germans.

In April 1943, the Hitlerites announced that the Germans had found several mass graves in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk, containing the bodies of thousands of Polish officers allegedly

murdered by the Russians.

This announcement was designed to further undermine the co-operation efforts of Poles and Soviets to defeat the Germans. The Russo-Polish alliance was always difficult because the Polish government in exile, based in London, was obviously a government of the exploiting classes. They had to oppose the Germans because of the latter's cynical takeover of their country for *lebensraum*. The Soviet Union's position was that so long as the Soviet Union could retain the land east of the Curzon line, they had no problem with the re-establishment of a bourgeois government in Poland. But the alliance was already in difficulties because the Polish government in exile, headed by General Sikorski, based in London, would not agree to the return of that land. This is in spite of the fact that in 1941 after Hitler invaded Poland, the Soviet Union and the Polish government in exile had not only established diplomatic relations but had also agreed that the Soviet Union would finance "*under the orders of a chief appointed by the Polish government-in-exile but approved by the Soviet government*" the formation of a Polish army – this chief being, in the event, the thoroughly anti-Soviet General Anders (a prisoner of the Soviets from 1939). By 25 October 1941 this Army had 41,000 men including 2,630 officers. General Anders, however, eventually refused to fight on the Soviet-German front because of the border dispute between the Soviet Union and Poland, and the Polish army had to be sent elsewhere to fight – i.e., Iran.

Nevertheless, despite the hostility of the Polish government in exile, there was a significant section of Poles resident in the Soviet Union who were not anti-Soviet and did accept the Soviet claim to the territories east of the Curzon line. Many of them were Jewish. These people formed the Union of Polish Patriots which put together the backbone of an alternative Polish government in exile.

The Nazi propaganda relating to the Katyn massacres was designed to make it impossible for the Soviets to have any dealings with the Poles at all. General Sikorski took up the Nazi propaganda with a vengeance, claiming to Churchill that he had a "wealth of evidence". How he had obtained this "evidence" simultaneously with the German announcement of this supposed Soviet atrocity is not clear, although it speaks loudly of secret collaboration between Sikorski and the Nazis. The Germans had made public their allegations on 13 April. On 16 April the Soviet government issued an official communiqué denying "*the slanderous fabrications about the alleged mass shootings by Soviet organs in the Smolensk area in the spring of 1940*". It added:

"The German statement leaves no doubt about the tragic fate of the former Polish prisoners of war who, in 1941, were engaged in building jobs in areas west of Smolensk and who, together with many Soviet people, fell into the hands of the German hangmen after the withdrawal of Soviet troops".

The Germans had in fabricating their story decided to embellish it with an anti-Semitic twist by claiming to be able to name Soviet officials in charge of the massacre, all of whom had Jewish names. On 19 April *Pravda* responded:

"Feeling the indignation of the whole of progressive humanity over their massacre of peaceful citizens and particularly of Jews, the Germans are now trying to arouse the anger of gullible people against the Jews. For this reason they have invented a whole collection of 'Jewish commissars' who, they say, took part in the murder of the 10,000 Polish officers. For such experienced fakers it was not difficult to invent a few names of people who never existed – Lev Rybak, Avraam Brodninsky, Chaim Fineberg. No such persons ever existed either in the 'Smolensk section of

the OGPU' or in any other department of the NLVD..."

The insistence of Sikorski in endorsing the German propaganda led to the complete breakdown in relations between the London Polish government in exile and the Soviet government – as to which Goebbels commented in his diary:

"This break represents a one-hundred-per-cent victory for German propaganda and especially for me personally ... we have been able to convert the Katyn incident into a highly political question."

At the time the British press condemned Sikorski for his intransigence:

The Times of 28 April 1943 wrote: "Surprise as well as regret will be felt by those who have had so much cause to understand the perfidy and ingenuity of the Goebbels propaganda machine should themselves have fallen into the trap laid by it. Poles will hardly have forgotten a volume widely circulated in the first winter of the war which described with every detail of circumstantial evidence, including that of photography, alleged Polish atrocities against the peaceful German inhabitants of Poland."

What lay at the basis of Sikorski's insistence that the massacre had been carried out by the Soviets rather than the Germans was the dispute over the territory east of the Curzon line. Sikorski was trying to use the German propaganda to mobilise western imperialism behind Poland's claim to that territory, to try to force them out of the position, as he saw it, of taking the Soviet Union's side on the issue of this border dispute.

If one reads bourgeois sources today, they all assert that the Soviet

Union was responsible for the Katyn massacre, and they do so with such assurance and consistency that in trying to argue the contrary one feels like a Nazi revisionist trying to deny Hitler's slaughter of Jews. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Gorbachov was even enrolled on this disinformation campaign and produced material allegedly from the Soviet archives which 'proved' that the Soviets committed the atrocity and, of course, that they did so on Stalin's orders. Well, we know the interest that the Gorbachovs of this world have in demonising Stalin. Their target is not so much Stalin as socialism. Their purpose in denigrating socialism is to restore capitalism and bring lives of luxurious parasitism to themselves and their hangers-on at the cost of mass suffering among the Soviet peoples. Their cynicism matches that of the German Nazis and it is hardly surprising to find them singing from the same hymn sheet.

Bourgeois sources blithely claim that Soviet evidence in support of blaming the Germans for the atrocity was either totally absent or based purely on hearsay evidence of terrorised inhabitants of the region. They don't mention one piece of evidence which even Goebbels had to admit was a bit of a bummer from his point of view. He wrote in his diary on 8 May 1943, "*Unfortunately, German ammunition has been found in the graves at Katyn ... It is essential that this incident remains a top secret. If it were to come to the knowledge of the enemy the whole Katyn affair would have to be dropped.*"

In 1971 there was correspondence in *The Times* suggesting the Katyn massacres could not have been done by the Germans since they went in for machine gunning and gas chambers rather than despatching prisoners in the way the Katyn victims had been killed, i.e., by a shot in the back of the head. A former German soldier then living in Godalming, Surrey, intervened in this corre-

spondence:

"As a German soldier, at that time convinced of the righteousness of our cause, I have taken part in many battles and actions during the Russian campaign. I have not been to Katyn nor to the forest nearby. But I well remember the hullabaloo when the news broke in 1943 about the discovery of the ghastly mass grave near Katyn, which area was then threatened by the Red Army.

"Josef Goebbels, as the historic records show, has fooled many people. After all, that was his job and few would dispute his almost complete mastery of it. What is surprising indeed, however, is that it still shows evidence in the pages of The Times thirty odd years later. Writing from experience I do not think that at that late time of the war Goebbels managed to fool many German soldiers in Russia on the Katyn issue ... German soldiers knew about the shot in the back of the head all right ... we German soldiers knew that the Polish officers were despatched by none other than our own."

Moreover, very many witnesses came forward to attest to the presence of Polish prisoners in the region after the Germans had taken it over.

Maria Alexandrovna Sashneva, a local primary school teacher, gave evidence to a Special commission set up by the Soviet Union in September 1943, immediately after the area was liberated from the Germans, to the effect that in August 1941, two months after Soviet withdrawal, she had hidden a Polish war prisoner in her house. His name had been Juzeph Lock, and he had spoken to her of ill-treatment suffered by Polish prisoners under the Germans:

"When the Germans arrived they seized the Polish camp and

instituted a strict regime in it. The Germans did not regard the Poles as human beings. They oppressed and outraged them in every way. On some occasions Poles were shot without any reason at all. He decided to escape... "

Several other witnesses gave evidence that they had seen the Poles during August and September 1941 working on the roads.

Moreover, witnesses also testified to round-ups by the Germans of escaped Polish prisoners in the autumn of 1941. Danilenko, a local peasant, was among several witnesses who testified to this.

"Special round ups were held in our place to catch Polish war prisoners who had escaped. Some searches took place in my house 2 or 3 times. After one such search I asked the headman .. whom they were looking for in our village. [He] said that an order had been received from the German Kommandatur according to which searches were to be made in all houses without exception, since Polish war prisoners who had escaped from the camp were hiding in our village."

Obviously the Germans did not shoot the Poles in full sight of local witnesses, but there is nonetheless significant evidence from local people as to what was happening. One witness was Alexeyeva who had been detailed by the headman of her village to serve the German personnel at a country house in the section of the Katyn Forest known as Kozy Gory, which had been the rest home of the Smolensk administration of the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs. This house was situated some 700 metres from where the mass graves were found. Alexeyeva said:

"At the close of August and during most of September 1941 several trucks used to come practically every day to the Kozy

Gory country house. At first I paid no attention to that, but later I noticed that each time these trucks arrived at the grounds of the country house they stopped for half an hour, and sometimes for a whole hour, somewhere on the country road connecting the country house with the highway. I drew this conclusion because some time after these trucks reached the grounds of the country house the noise they made would cease.

"Simultaneously with the noise stopping single shots would be heard. The shots followed each other at short but approximately even intervals. Then the shooting would die down and the trucks would drive right up to the country house. German soldiers and NCOs came out of the trucks. Talking noisily they went to wash in the bathhouse, after which they engaged in drunken orgies.

"On days when the trucks arrived more soldiers from some German military units used to arrive at the country house. Special beds were put up for them... Shortly before the trucks reached the country house armed soldiers went to the forest evidently to the spot where the trucks stopped because in half an hour they returned in these trucks, together with the soldiers who lived permanently in the country house.

"... On several occasions I noticed stains of fresh blood on the clothes of two Lance Corporals. From all this I inferred that the Germans brought people in the truck to the country house and shot them".

Alexeyeva also discovered that the people being shot were Polish prisoners.

"Once I stayed at the country house somewhat later than usual... Before I finished the work which had kept me there, a soldier

suddenly entered and told me I could go ... He ... accompanied me to the highway.

"Standing on the highway 150 or 200 metres from where the road branches off to the country house I saw a group of about 30 Polish war prisoners marching along the highway under heavy German escort... I halted near the roadside to see where they were being led, and I saw that they turned towards our country house at Kozy Gory.

"Since by that time I had begun to watch closely everything going on at the country house, I became interested. I went back some distance along the highway, hid in bushes near the roadside, and waited. In some 20 or 30 minutes I heard the familiar single shots."

The other two requisitioned maids at the country house, Mikhailova and Konakhovskaya, gave supporting evidence. Other residents of the area gave similar evidence.

Basilevsky, director of the Smolensk observatory, was appointed deputy burgomeister to Menshagin, a Nazi collaborator. Basilevsky was trying to secure the release from German custody of a teacher, Zhiglinsky, and persuaded Menshagin to speak to the German commander of the region, Von Schwetz, about this matter. Menshagin did so but reported back it was impossible to secure this release because "instructions had been received from Berlin prescribing the strictest regime be maintained."

Basilevsky then recounted his conversation with Menshagin:

"I involuntarily retorted 'Can anything else be stricter than the regime existing at the camp?' Menshagin looked at me in a

strange way and bending to my ear, answered in a low voice: yes, there can be! The Russians can at least be left to die off, but as to the Polish war prisoners, the orders say they are to be simply exterminated."

After liberation Menshagin's notebook was found written in his own handwriting, as confirmed by expert graphologists. Page 10, dated 15 August 1941, notes:

"All fugitive war prisoners are to be detained and delivered to the commandant's office."

This in itself proves the Polish prisoners were still alive at that time. On page 15, which is undated, the entry appears: *"Are there any rumours among the population concerning the shooting of Polish war prisoners in Kozy Gory (for Umnov)"* (Umnov was the Chief of the Russian police).

A number of witnesses gave evidence that they had been pressured in 1942-43 by the Germans to give false testimony as to the shooting of the Poles by the Russians.

Parfem Gavrilovich Kisselev, a resident of the village closest to Kozy Gory, testified that he had been summonsed in autumn of 1942 to the Gestapo where he was interviewed by a German officer:

"The officer stated that, according to information at the disposal of the Gestapo, in 1940, in the area of Kozy Gory in the Katyn Forest, staff members of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs shot Polish officers, and he asked me what testimony I could give on this score. I answered that I had never heard of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs shooting people at

Kozy Gory, and that anyhow it was impossible, I explained to the officer, since Kozy Gory is an absolutely open and much frequented place, and if shootings had gone on there the entire population of the neighbouring villages would have known ...

"... The interpreter, however, would not listen to me, but took a handwritten document from the desk and read it to me. It said that I, Kisselev, resident of a hamlet in the Kozy Gory area, personally witnessed the shooting of Polish officers by staff members of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs in 1940.

"Having read the document, the interpreter told me to sign it. I refused to do so... Finally he shouted 'Either you sign it at once or we shall destroy you. Make your choice.'

"Frightened by these threats, I signed the document and thought that would be the end of the matter."

But it wasn't the end of the matter, because the Germans expected Kisselev to give parol evidence of what he had 'witnessed' to groups of 'delegates' invited by the Germans to come to the area to witness the evidence of supposed Soviet atrocities.

Soon after the German authorities had announced the existence of the mass graves to the world in April 1943, *"the Gestapo interpreter came to my house and took me to the forest in the Kozy Gory area.*

"When we had left the house and were alone together, the interpreter warned me that I must tell the people present in the forest everything exactly as I had written it down in the document I had signed at the Gestapo.

"When I came to the forest I saw the open graves and a group of strangers. The interpreter told me that these were Polish delegates who had arrived to inspect the graves. When we approached the graves the delegates started asking me various questions in Russian in connection with the shooting of the Poles, but as more than a month had passed since I had been summoned to the Gestapo I forgot everything that was in the document I had signed, got mixed up, and finally said I didn't know anything about the shooting of Polish officers.

"The German officer got very angry. The interpreter roughly dragged me away from the 'delegation' and chased me off. Next morning a car with a Gestapo officer drove up to my house. He found me in the yard, told me that I was under arrest, put me into the car and took me to Smolensk Prison ...

"After my arrest I was interrogated many times, but they beat me more than they questioned me. The first time they summoned me they beat me up heavily and abused me, complaining that I had let them down, and then sent me back to the cell. During the next summons they told me I must state publicly that I had witnessed the shooting of Polish officers by the Bolsheviks, and that until the Gestapo was satisfied I would do this in good faith, I would not be released from prison. I told the officer that I would rather sit in prison than tell people lies to their faces. After that I was badly beaten up.

"There were several such interrogations accompanied by beatings, and as a result I lost all my strength, my hearing became poor and I could not move my right arm. About one month after my arrest a German officer summoned me and said: 'You see the consequences of your obstinacy, Kisselev. We have decided to execute you. In the morning we shall take you to Katyn Forest

and hang you.' I asked the officer not to do this, and started pleading with them that I was not fit for the part of 'eye-witness' of the shooting as I did not know how to tell lies and therefore I would mix everything up again.

"The officer continued to insist. Several minutes later soldiers came into the room and started beating me with rubber clubs. Being unable to stand the beatings and torture, I agreed to appear publicly with a fallacious tale about shooting of Poles by Bolsheviks. After that I was released from prison, on conditions that on the first demand of the Germans I would speak before 'delegations' in Katyn Forest...

"On every occasion, before leading me to the graves in the forest, the interpreter used to come to my house, call me out into the yard, take me aside to make sure that no one would hear, and for half an hour make me memorise by heart everything I would have to say about the alleged shooting of Polish officers by the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs in 1940.

"I recall that the interpreter told me something like this: 'I live in a cottage in 'Kozy Gory' area not far from the country house of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs. In spring 1940 I saw Poles taken on various nights to the forest and shot there'. And then it was imperative that I must state literally that 'this was the doing of the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs.' After I had memorised what the interpreter told me he would take me to the open graves in the forest and compel me to repeat all this in the presence of 'delegations' which came there.

"My statements were strictly supervised and directed by the Gestapo interpreter. Once when I spoke before some 'delegation', I was asked the question: 'Did you see these Poles

personally before they were shot by the Bolsheviks?' I was not prepared for such a question and answered the way it was in fact, i.e., that I saw Polish war prisoners before the war, as they walked on the roads. Then the interpreter roughly dragged me aside and drove me home.

"Please believe me when I say that all the time I felt pangs of conscience, as I knew that in reality the Polish officers had been shot by the Germans in 1941. I had no other choice, as I was constantly threatened with the repetition of my arrest and torture."

Numerous people corroborated Kisselev's testimony, and a medical examination corroborated his story of having been tortured by the Germans.

Pressure was also brought on Ivanov, employed at the local railway station (Gnezdovo) to bear false witness:

"The officer inquired whether I knew that in spring 1940 large parties of captured Polish officers had arrived at Gnezdovo station in several trains. I said that I knew about this. The officer then asked me whether I knew that in the same spring 1940, soon after the arrival of the Polish officers, the Bolsheviks had shot them all in the Katyn Forest. I answered that I did not know anything about that, and that it could not be so, as in the course of 1940-41 up to the occupation of Smolensk by the Germans, I had met captured Polish officers who had arrived in spring 1940 at Gnezdovo station, and who were engaged in road construction work.

"The officer told me that if a German officer said the Poles had been shot by the Bolsheviks it meant that this was a fact.

'Therefore', the officer continued, 'you need not fear anything, and you can sign with a clear conscience a protocol saying that the captured Polish officers were shot by the Bolsheviki and that you witnessed it'.

"I replied that I was already an old man, that I was 61 years old, and did not want to commit a sin in my old age. I could only testify that the captured Poles really arrived at Gnezdovo station in spring 1940. The German officer began to persuade me to give the required testimony promising that if I agreed he would promote me from the position of watchman on a railway crossing to that of stationmaster of Gnezdovo station, which I had held under the Soviet Government, and also to provide for my material needs.

"The interpreter emphasised that my testimony as a former railway official at Gnezdovo station, the nearest station to Katyn Forest, was extremely important for the German Command, and that I would not regret it if I gave such testimony. I understood that I had landed in an extremely difficult situation, and that a sad fate awaited me. However, I again refused to give false testimony to the German officer. He started shouting at me, threatened me with a beating and shooting, and said I did not understand what was good for me. However, I stood my ground. The interpreter then drew up a short protocol in German on one page, and gave me a free translation of its contents. This protocol recorded, as the interpreter told me, only the fact of the arrival of the Polish war prisoners at Gnezdovo station. When I asked that my testimony be recorded not only in German but also in Russian, the officer finally went beside himself with fury, beat me up with a rubber club and drove me off the premises... "

Savvateyev was another person pressurised by the Germans to

give false testimony. He told the Soviet Commission of Inquiry:

"In the Gestapo I testified that in spring 1940 Polish war prisoners arrived at the station of Gnezdovo in several trains and proceeded further in trucks, and I did not know where they went. I also added that I repeatedly met those Poles later on the Moscow-Minsk highway, where they were working on repairs in small groups. The officer told me I was mixing things up, that I could not have met the Poles on the highway, as they had been shot by the Bolsheviks, and demanded that I testify to this.

"I refused. After threatening and cajoling me for a long time, the officer consulted with the interpreter about something in German, and then the interpreter wrote a short protocol and gave it to me to sign. He explained that it was a record of my testimony. I asked the interpreter to let me read the protocol myself, but he interrupted me with abuse, ordering me to sign it immediately and get out. I hesitated a minute. The interpreter seized a rubber club hanging on the wall and made to strike me. After that I signed the protocol shoved at me. The interpreter told me to get out and go home, and not to talk to anyone or I would be shot..."

Others gave similar testimony.

Evidence was also given as to how the Germans 'doctored' the graves of the victims to try to eliminate evidence that the massacre took place not in the autumn of 1941 but in the spring of 1940 shortly after the Poles first arrived in the area. Alexandra Mikhailovna had worked during the German occupation in the kitchen of a German military unit. In March 1943 she found a Russian war prisoner hiding in her shed:

"From conversation with him I learned that his name was Nikolai

Yegorov, a native of Leningrad. Since the end of 1941 he had been in the German camp No. 126 for war prisoners in the town of Smolensk. At the beginning of March 1943, he was sent with a column of several hundred war prisoners from the camp to Katyn Forest. There they, including Yegorov, were compelled to dig up graves containing bodies in the uniforms of Polish officers, drag these bodies out of the graves and take out of their pockets documents, letters, photographs and all other articles.

"The Germans gave the strictest orders that nothing be left in the pockets on the bodies. Two war prisoners were shot because after they had searched some of the bodies, a German officer discovered some papers on these bodies. Articles, documents and letters extracted from the clothing on the bodies were examined by the German officers, who then compelled the prisoners to put part of the papers back into the pockets on the bodies, while the rest was flung on a heap of articles and documents they had extracted, and later burned.

"Besides this, the Germans made the prisoners put in the pockets of the Polish officers some papers which they took from the cases or suitcases (I don't remember exactly) which they had brought along. All the war prisoners lived in Katyn Forest in dreadful conditions under the open sky, and were extremely strongly guarded... At the beginning of April 1943, all the work planned by the Germans was apparently completed, as for three days not one of the war prisoners had to do any work...

"Suddenly at night all of them without exception were awakened and led somewhere. The guard was strengthened. Yegorov sensed something was wrong and began to watch very closely everything that was happening. They marched for three or four hours in an unknown direction. They stopped in the forest at a

pit in a clearing. He saw how a group of war prisoners were separated from the rest and driven towards the pit and then shot. The war prisoners grew agitated, restless and noisy. Not far from Yegorov several war prisoners attacked the guards. Other guards ran towards the place. Yegorov took advantage of the confusion and ran away into the dark forest, hearing shouts and firing.

"After hearing this terrible story, which is engraved on my memory for the rest of my life, I became very sorry for Yegorov, and told him to come to my room, get warm and hide at my place until he had regained his strength. But Yegorov refused... He said no matter what happened he was going away that very night, and intended to try to get through the front line to the Red Army. In the morning, when I went to make sure whether Yegorov had gone, he was still in the shed. It appeared that in the night he had attempted to set out, but had only taken about 50 steps when he felt so weak that he was forced to return. This exhaustion was caused by the long imprisonment at the camp and the starvation of the last days. We decided he should remain at my place several days longer to regain his strength. After feeding Yegorov I went to work. When I returned home in the evening my neighbours Branova, Mariya Ivanovna, Kabanovskaya, Yekaterina Viktorovna told me that in the afternoon, during a search by the German police, the Red Army war prisoner had been found, and taken away."

Further corroboration was given by an engineer mechanic called Sukhachev who had worked under the Germans as a mechanic in the Smolensk city mill:

"I was working at the mill in the second half of March, 1943. There I spoke to a German chauffeur who spoke a little Russian,

and since he was carrying flour to Savenki village for the troops, and was returning on the next day to Smolensk, I asked him to take me along so that I could buy some fats in the village. My idea was that making the trip in a German truck would get over the risk of being held up at the control stations. The German agreed to take me, at a price.

"On the same day at 10 p.m. we drove on to the Somolensk-Vitebsk highway, just myself and the German driver in the machine. The night was light, and only a low mist over the road reduced the visibility. Approximately 22 or 23 kilometres from Smolensk at a demolished bridge on the highway there is a rather deep descent at the by-pass. We began to go down from the highway, when suddenly a truck appeared out of the fog coming towards us. Either because our brakes were out of order, or because the driver was inexperienced, we were unable to bring our truck to a halt, and since the passage was quite narrow we collided with the truck coming towards us. The impact was not very violent, as the driver of the other truck swerved to the side, as a result of which the trucks bumped and slid alongside each other.

"The right wheel of the other truck, however, landed in the ditch, and the truck fell over on the slope. Our truck remained upright. The driver and I immediately jumped out of the cabin and ran up to the truck which had fallen down. We were met by a heavy stench of putrefying flesh coming evidently from the truck.

"On coming nearer, I saw that the truck was carrying a load covered with a tarpaulin and tied up with ropes. The ropes had snapped with the impact, and part of the load had fallen out on the slope. This was a horrible load – human bodies dressed in military uniforms. As far as I can remember there were some six

or seven men near the truck: one German driver, two Germans armed with tommy-guns – the rest were Russian war prisoners, as they spoke Russian and were dressed accordingly.

"The Germans began to abuse my driver and then made some attempts to right the truck. In about two minutes time two more trucks drove up to the place of the accident and pulled up. A group of Germans and Russian war prisoners, about ten men in all, came up to us from these trucks. ... By joint efforts we began to raise the truck. Taking advantage of an opportune moment I asked one of the Russian war prisoners in a low voice: 'What is it?' He answered very quietly: 'For many nights already we have been carrying bodies to Katyn Forest'.

"Before the overturned truck had been raised a German NCO came up to me and my driver and ordered us to proceed immediately. As no serious damage had been done to our truck the driver steered it a little to one side and got on to the highway, and we went on. When we were passing the two covered trucks which had come up later I again smelled the horrible stench of dead bodies".

Various other people also gave testimony of having seen the trucks loaded with dead bodies.

One Zhukhov, a pathologist who actually visited graves in April 1943 at the invitation of the Germans, also gave evidence:

"The clothing of the bodies, particularly the greatcoats, boots and belts, were in a good state of preservation. The metal parts of the clothing – belt buckles, button hooks and spikes on shoe soles, etc. – were not heavily rusted, and in some cases the metal still retained its polish. Sections of the skin of the bodies which

could be seen – faces, necks, arms – were chiefly a dirty green colour, and in some cases dirty brown, but there was no complete disintegration of the tissues, no putrefaction. In some cases bared tendons of whitish colour and parts of muscles could be seen.

"While I was at the excavations people were at work sorting and extracting bodies at the bottom of a big pit. For this purpose they used spades and other tools, and also took hold of bodies with their hands and dragged them from place to place by the arms, the legs or the clothing. I did not see a single case of bodies falling apart or any member being torn off.

"Considering all the above, I arrived at the conclusion that the bodies had remained in the earth not three years, as the Germans affirmed, but much less. Knowing that in mass graves, and especially without coffins, putrefaction of bodies progresses more quickly than in single graves, I concluded that the mass shooting of the Poles had taken place about a year and a half ago, and could have occurred in autumn 1941 or in spring 1942. As a result of my visit to the excavation site I became firmly convinced that a monstrous crime had been committed by the Germans."

Several other people who visited the graves at the time gave like testimony.

Moreover, pathologists who examined the bodies in 1943 concluded that they could not have been dead longer than two years. Furthermore, documents were found on some of the bodies which had obviously been missed by the Germans when they doctored the evidence. These included a letter dated September 1940, a postcard dated 12 November 1940, a pawn ticket receipted 14

March 1941 and another receipted 25 March 1941. Receipts dated 6 April 1941, 5 May 1941, 15 May 1941 and an unmailed postcard in Polish dated 20 June 1941. Although all these dates pre-date Soviet withdrawal, they all postdate the time of the alleged murder of the prisoners by the Soviet authorities in the spring of 1940, the time given as the date of the supposed massacre by all those whom the Germans were able to bully into giving false testimony. If, as is claimed by bourgeois propagandists, these documents are forgeries, it would have been the easiest thing to forge documents which postdated the Soviet departure, but this was not done – and it was not done because the documents found were undoubtedly genuine.