

ENCOUNTER WITH KATYN

Tadeusz Wolsza

ENCOUNTER WITH KATYN

**The wartime and postwar story of Poles
who saw the Katyn site in 1943**

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FOREWORD

There are points in history which shape the identity of nations. They are significant vantage points, collections of the most important events, works, and ideas. One such event in Polish history is the Katyń Massacre. The aim of its perpetrators was the genocidal extermination of the Polish national elite. The Polish officers who were taken prisoner without trial or sentence were murdered with a bullet in the back of the head, and buried in a mass grave in a forest, unbeknownst to their families. They were doomed to oblivion because they were Polish, their thoughts were Polish, they looked at the world through the lens of Polish values and the Polish national interest. They were considered incapable of adapting to the Soviet system based on the communist ideology. They were members of the Polish intelligentsia, the elite of the prewar state, therefore they were to perish so as not to lead the nation in defiance against the imminent conquest of its territories by the Soviets.

The story we present in this book is interwoven with the drama of the lives of people who testified to that crime. The Katyń affair is the story of a great lie that spread around the world and was designed to be perpetuated and established forever. The truth about the crimes of the Red Army and the nature of the Communist system was not to be told. For this reason, there were two realities: one that strove for the truth, and the other, the official line. Those who thought or spoke differently were oppressed, not only in Poland by the Communist secret police, but also throughout the world by intelligence agencies and fellow travelers, such as Communist parties in Western Europe. The title of the book, *Encounter with Katyń*, reflects that reality, because those who came into contact with this issue, even by random chance or unintentionally, faced far-reaching repressive measures for the rest of their lives.

The Katyń Massacre challenged the fundamental values recognized by the Euro-Atlantic community – freedom of speech, religious freedom, and human

rights. The Polish people professed values which were an obstacle to the totalitarian regimes of Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union. There was no place for such values in the Communist State. Therefore, the disclosure of the Katyń Massacre was deemed unwelcome by the British, Soviet, and American alliance, and the world could not learn the truth until the Cold War.

Today, the Katyń Massacre is still a relevant issue, not only because the Russian Federation has still not made all the documents accessible to Polish academics for research, the perpetrators have not been brought to justice even symbolically, and the families of the murdered officers have not received compensation. It is important to put these issues, which have been distorted and denied for years, on an international agenda, and to bring them to an honest closure. It is not merely a matter of restoring elementary justice, but also a philosophical and ethical question. Raising this issue is a duty for the civilized world, which holds that the passage of time does not allow the crime of genocide to be swept under the carpet. At a time when the rulers of the Russian Federation invoke the heritage of the USSR, it is indeed worth recalling the nature of that system and issuing a geopolitical warning to the entire free world that the dream of an end to history is about to end.

Paweł Kurtyka
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