

NKVD Special Department in Bykivnia Forest as an Object of Anti-Soviet Propaganda During the German-Soviet War

Mykola Bryvko

ORCID ID: 0000-0002-7959-8505

National Historical and Memorial Reserve "Bykivnia Graves" (Kyiv, Ukraine)

Abstract

The study is devoted to the propaganda campaign of the Nazi government of Germany in Europe with the exposure of the repressive and punitive policy of the Soviet totalitarian regime in Kyiv. Based on the publication in European and Ukrainian periodicals, an attempt is made to determine the role of the NKVD special area in the Bykivnia Forest as an object of anti-Soviet propaganda during the German-Soviet War. The array of mass media and other historical sources is characterized, in particular the propaganda leaflet of 1943 which shows the place of the largest burial of victims of Stalinist repressions in the system of political repressions and defines the main tendencies of propagandists during the exposure of Soviet crimes, primarily through the example of the NKVD special area in the Bykivnia Forest. The archival and criminal case of a participant in search and exhumation works, a resident of the village of Bykivnia, regarding the discovery of the burial place of the victims of Stalinist political repressions and the place of the residents of the village in anti-Soviet Nazi propaganda are analyzed.

The British diplomat Lord Arthur Ponsonby in his book *Falsehood in War-Time* (Ponsonby, 1928) laid out the basic principles of wartime propaganda, which were systematized in modern times by Annie Morelli (Morelli, 2001). Among them, there is the principle “the enemy purposefully commits evil deeds,” or “the leader of our opponent is inherently evil.” But when formulating them, Arthur Ponsonby hardly considered how relevant they would become and how accurately they would reflect the propaganda of totalitarian regimes, the Russian one, in opposition to the legal foundations of the life of a democratic society.

There are many definitions of the term “propaganda” itself, and in this context, in our opinion, propaganda should be understood as a certain form of communication, which is expressed in the dissemination of facts, arguments, rumors and other information with the aim of influencing the state of public opinion or public position and its formation is in the interests of the one who carries out the specified propaganda (Vasylyshyn, 2016, p. 100). That was actively used by totalitarian regimes, both now and on the eve of and during the Second World War, and the German-Soviet War of 1941–1945, in particular.

The historiographical discourse of the propaganda of political repressions in modern historical science is not new. It is quite well-studied, as evidenced, in particular, by the articles of S. Kropachev (2011a, 2011b), O. Popova (2011), M. Bryvko (2016, 2018), etc. In addition, O. Maievskiy, M. Mykhailiuk, D. Tytarenko, Yu. Smelianska, I. Shchupak, S. Ivanov, D. Welch, E. Król, M. Stout, J. Baird, J. Herf, and A. Rhodes have studied various manifestations of German propaganda during the Second World War. These researchers also documented the crimes of the NKVD and the burial places of victims of political repression. For example, in his work, Maievskiy (2017) focuses on the German propaganda campaign that exposed the crimes of the NKVD bodies in Vinnytsia mainly through poster and caricature graphics and leaflets, rather than through periodical media. John-Paul Himka (2013) reveals the process of exposing the crimes of the NKVD in Lviv in the summer of 1941 and in Vinnytsia in 1943, using the example of the publications of the newspaper “Krakivs´ki visti.”

Publications are no less relevant in this context: S. Stelnykovych (2014), N. Kras (S. Vainstein) (2016), O. Melnychuk & V. Dovganyuk (2020), E. Król (2006), K. Ledford (2012), R. Morawski (2013), A. Kunert (2021), T. Urban (2019), O. Kornilova (2021), V. Kiknadze (2021), etc. At the same time, regarding the study of the propaganda of political repressions and the exposure of the NKVD special area in the Bykivnia Forest near Kyiv, gaps are observed, preventing the historians from focusing their attention on one of the largest burial places of the victims of Stalinist repressions of 1937–1941. And this is primarily due to the lack of study of primary sources.

The purpose of the work is to study and attempt to analyze the available publications of the European and Ukrainian mass media in 1941 by the

German occupation authorities regarding one of the largest burial sites of victims of Stalinist political repressions in the Bykivnia Forest near Kyiv, as an object of anti-Soviet propaganda.

With the beginning of the war between Nazi Germany and the Soviet Union, one of the important elements of the struggle became propaganda, which tried to interpret the events in a favorable world for one of the parties, including exposing the crimes of the other.

In the Directive of the Chief of Staff of the Supreme Command of the German Armed Forces “On Propaganda during the Attack on the Soviet Union” of 6 June 1941, among the new ways of introducing propaganda work, attention is drawn to the fact that:

Germany’s adversary is not the peoples of the Soviet Union, but exclusively the Jewish – the Bolshevik Soviet government with all subordinate employees and the Communist Party; [...] in relation to the entire population of the territory conquered by them, the Soviets always pursued and continue to pursue a policy of unrestricted violence... (Sukharev, 1989, p. 561).

Later, in the “Additional directives on the implementation of propaganda in Ukraine” dated 16 December 1942, it is indicated that it is necessary to “increasingly awaken memories of the death of millions from starvation, of the twenty-year constant struggle to destroy the Bolsheviks against the Ukrainian peasantry...” (Tytarenko, 2010, p. 480). Accordingly, this was reflected in the exposure of the crimes of the NKVD bodies and the burial places of victims of political repression.

This trend was new. Nazi ideologues were aware that their main enemy would be the communist ideological machine, and therefore even before 1939, the basic foundations of anti-Soviet propaganda were being formed in Germany, and one of the clearest examples of this is the poster “Bolshevism without a mask,” which was displayed at an exhibition in 1937 (Maievskyi, 2018, p. 90). Overall, Nazi propaganda consistently peddled fear of “Bolshevism,” except during the period from 1939 to 1941, and political posters helped to contribute to this, such as Hans Schweitzer’s poster “Victory or Bolshevism,” which attempted to justify Germany’s war against the Soviet Union, or the poster by an unknown author “Bolshevism is slavery, violence, mass murder, and destruction” (Maievskyi, 2018, p. 94). Furthermore, as we can see, reports of the exhumation of victims of Stalinist repression were quite extensive, detailed, and credible, and most importantly, carefully thought out (Morawski, 2013, p. 13). This is evident in the discoveries of mass graves in Katyn, Vynnytsia, and partially in Lviv.

The rapid offensive of German troops at the beginning of the war on 22 June 1941 and the overcrowding of prisons in Eastern Galicia accelerated

the deployment with new force of the Soviet totalitarian regime of repression against the so-called “enemies of the people.” Thus, on 23 June 1941, the Order No. 2445/M of the People’s Commissar of State Security V. Merkulov was issued, which regulated measures regarding prisoners and emphasized both their evacuation to the east and the compilation of lists of those who should be shot (Order..., 1994). It was supplemented, in particular, by the order of the head of the prison administration of the NKVD of the Ukrainian SSR, captain of state security Filipov (Bilas, 1994, p. 222). These two orders, and a number of other similar orders, intensified the mass extermination of those repressed by the NKVD throughout Ukraine.

The seen crimes of the NKVD “shocked” the German military, as well as the Ukrainians themselves. German propaganda immediately took advantage of this, demonstrating the criminal nature of Bolshevism. So, for example, with the occupation of the city of Lviv on 30 June 1941, the first military propaganda letters, notes and other publications exposing the crimes of the Bolshevik regime appeared. In particular, Lieutenant Lorenz Wechter wrote in a letter to a political leader in Neunkirchen on 20 August 1941:

I really cannot describe what we saw in Lemberg (Lviv). Much worse than the German newspapers managed to describe. It was necessary to see it. Even the stench of corpses, visible far beyond the walls of the prison, was enough to make me sick. And the scene itself. Hundreds of murdered men, women and children were terribly mutilated... (Diewerge, 1941).

In addition, on 6 July 1941, the German newspaper “*Völkischer Beobachter*” (Munich) published the article *Unvorstellbare Greuel der befreiten Ukraine* [Unbelievable horrors of liberated Ukraine] with photographs of victims of Soviet repression in Lviv (Unvorstellbare Greuel..., 1941, p. 1). Similar publications appear, for example, in Austrian publications: “*Znaimer Tagblatt*”, “*Wiener neueste Nachrichten*”, “*Illustrierte Kronen Zeitung*”, “*Das kleine Volksblatt*”, Polish-language: “*Goniec Krakowski*”, “*Dziennik Radomski*”, and the Ukrainian-language newspaper “*Krakivs’ki visti*”, etc. In occupied Ukraine, a similar article was published even earlier, already on July 5, 1941, in the Lviv newspaper “*Ukrayins’ki shchodenni visti*” (U Lvivskikh..., 1941, p. 2), where the truth about the crimes of the Soviet government was exposed and the names of those murdered and executed were indicated for the first time victims of repression. The following issues of this newspaper continue to cover the crimes of the NKVD in Lviv.

However, the greatest and most thorough wave of propaganda material concerning the crimes of the Soviet NKVD authorities was observed in 1943, primarily regarding the burials in Katyn, and later in Vinnytsia.

Therefore, not only do the brochures *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn* (1943) and *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Winniza* (1944) have a great source-critical importance, but so do numerous publications and reports in propaganda tabloid newspapers, as well as radio broadcasts, newsreels, and documentary films.

On 11 April 1943, the German news agency “Transocean” announced the terrible discovery of NKVD crimes in the Katyn Forest by German soldiers (Morawski, 2013, p. 13), and on 13 April 1943, an official statement was released on Greater Germany radio in Berlin and in the German Press Agency [DNB]. This was the result of the realization by Joseph Goebbels, the Reich Minister of Propaganda and Public Enlightenment in Germany, of the propaganda opportunity and attempt to use Katyn, and later Vinnytsia, as part of the “propaganda of pessimism” that began after Stalingrad. The importance of starting this is evidenced by Goebbels’ diary entry, where he notes that “...Unfortunately, I have not made any progress regarding propaganda in the occupied eastern territories and in the Soviet Union” (Kornilova, 2021).

Goebbels aimed to address three audiences, namely the Poles, and in the case of Vinnytsia, the Ukrainians, trying to mobilize them on the side of the Germans to defend against the advancing Red Army; the Western allies, trying to sow discord between them and their Soviet ally; and the German people, in order to toughen them up for stronger defensive efforts by instilling fear of the consequences of a Soviet victory (Ledford, 2012, p. 586).

In this context, Hans Meyer’s proposal to involve the Polish press in the inspection of the graves in Katyn and to present this crime to the world as “undeniable proof that Bolshevism is ready to achieve its goals in a bestial way...” (Adamska, 2021, p. 201) becomes relevant. In addition, Adolf Hitler himself was directly interested in this campaign, insisting on “using this matter throughout the world by all available means” (Adamska, 2021, p. 209; *The Katyn Forest Massacre...*, 1952, p. 1339).

In practice, one of the first and most numerous visitors to the burial site in the Katyn Forest were journalists, particularly from neutral countries, which according to the Germans was dictated by a concern to create a situation where they could not be accused of bias (Wolsza, 2018, p. 16). In addition, well-known writers, scientists, and photojournalists from various countries were involved in visiting Katyn, who were “struck” by the crimes of the Soviet regime. For example, Polish writer Jan Emil Skiwski (1894–1956) noted that “what he saw was beyond human imagination” (Wolsza, 2018, p. 17).

In general, starting the campaign of demonizing the Soviet Union, Goebbels carefully worked to include particularly gruesome images of exhumations and dissections. This can be seen, for example, in the documentary film *Im Wald von Katyn* (Hippler, 1943) and other propaganda newsreels, as well as in illustrated magazines such as the Polish-language

biweekly "Signal", where a whole series of photographs were published on three pages (Król, 2006, p. 418). Similar tactics were used in brochures such as *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Katyn* (1943), *Amtliches Material zum Massenmord von Winniza* (1944), and *Der Massenmord im Walde von Katyn: Ein Tatsachenberocht auf Grund amtlicher Unterlagen* (1943), which concluded that Katyn "will live on as the largest and most brutal mass murder in world history, but it is only one, albeit particularly terrible, case of the Jewish-Bolshevik practice of killing" (Ledford, 2012, p. 587).

Moreover, similar trends in the coverage of the burial sites in Katyn and later in Vinnytsia can be observed in numerous publications, such as German publications – "Völkischer Beobachter", "Znaimer Tagblatt", "Gumbinner allgemeine Zeitung", "Neue Vetschauer Zeitung", "Ukrayins'kyy Visnyk"; as well as Austrian – "Neue Warte am Inn", or Ukrainian-language – "Vinnyts'ki Visti", "Nove ukrayins'ke slovo", "Nove Zaporizhzhia", "Nova doba", "Nove Zhyttya."

We see something similar in Lviv as early as 1941, although on a smaller scale.

On the other hand, there are limitations and peculiarities in the coverage of the mass burial in the Bykivnia Forest near Kyiv (the territory of the NKVD special zone). It should be noted that the special zone officially appeared on the basis of the decision of the Presidium of the Kyiv City Council on 20 March 1937 (Protokol zasidannya Prezydiyi Kyivivs'koyi mis'kokh rady..., 1937, p. 15) and started functioning fully from mid-summer 1937 until September 1941 inclusive, where bodies of those executed in Kyiv prisons as victims of political repression were secretly buried at night in prepared pits on an area of about 5,3 hectares. As Andriy Amons notes, no less than 35,000 executed people were secretly buried in the territory of the special zone, including not only well-known and significant figures, but also a significant number of peasants, workers, and others (Amons, 2017, p. 201).

Whose memory always remains, despite the efforts of the Soviet totalitarian regime to conceal their crime and blame it on others. Thus, on 15 July 1988, the first rally to honor the memory of political repression victims took place on the territory of the former NKVD special zone in the Bykivnia Forest. And on 21 September 2012, in the presence of the Presidents of Poland and Ukraine, the International Memorial to the Victims of Totalitarianism of 1937–1941 was solemnly opened, where the memory of the victims of totalitarianism is honored annually in May.

In addition, the Memorial is visited by many state and religious officials from various European countries. In 2001, Pope John Paul II visited the Bykivnia burial site, and in 2015 and 2020, the President of the Republic of Poland, Andrzej Duda, visited (Prezydent Republiki Pol'shcha..., 2015, 2020). On 2 October 2022, the Deputy Marshal of the Sejm of the Republic of Poland, Małgorzata Gosiewska, visited the Bykivnia burial site (Vizyt do Zapovidnyka..., 2022).

The activities of the employees of the National Historical and Memorial Reserve “Bykivnia Graves,” including the creation of banner exhibitions (“Bykivnia 1937–1938: Polish Line,” “Crossing the Kyiv Styx” and others), lectures, and information and educational projects, such as the electronic postcards *Bykivnia Tragedy: Names from Nameless Graves* (Bykivnians´ka trahediia..., 2022), initiated back in 2017, or articles in the series “Pages of the Bykivnia Martyrology,” or video portraits “Portraits of Bykivnia” located on the Reserve’s YouTube channel, contribute to the preservation of the memory of those repressed.

Remembering the names of those repressed by the Stalinist regime should also include citizens of other countries, primarily Poland. This is associated with the implementation by the organs of the NKVD of the criminal Resolution of the Politburo of the Central Committee of the CPSU (B) of 5 March 1940 (Secret Documents..., 1993, p. 19), as a result of which 21,857 Polish citizens were shot and buried (Secret Documents..., 1993, p. 20), although Andriy Amons, citing the text of the Politburo Resolution of the CPSU (B) of 5 March 1940, indicates that 25,700 people were shot (Amons, 2022, p. 154). This occurred not only in Katyn, Mednoye, Kharkiv, and Kherson, but also in Kyiv, as evidenced by the remains of Polish citizens found on the territory of the special site in the Bykivnia forest during search and exhumation work as early as 1971 (Kiselev, 1990, p. 5). In total, as of 2007, the remains of at least 1,488 Poles had been found (Kola, 2012, p. 21). And this is only a part of the repressed Polish citizens from the so-called “Ukrainian Katyn list” of 3,435 people compiled by the head of the first special department of the NKVD of the Ukrainian SSR, F. Tsvetukhin, in 1940, which was discovered in the Sectoral State Archives of the Security Service of Ukraine in Kyiv (Filimonikhin, 2022, pp. 360–361).

Occupying the city of Kiev on 19 September 1941, German troops, with the involvement of local residents from the village of Bykivnia, carried out a search and exhumation of the burial site of those repressed at the special facility just two days later, on 21 September. A week later, the German occupation authorities began to report in the mass media about this place of burial of victims of political repression. The most famous and widespread is the article of the military correspondent A. Peter Kollmus, the text of which is known to most scientists through publication in the newspaper “Berliner Börsen-Zeitung” (Berlin). The article stated that:

By chance, on Sunday, 21 September 1941, German soldiers found one of the mass graves where the executioners of the GPU buried their worthy sympathy victims. Ober-lieutenant H. and some of his subordinates [...] in the middle of the forest in the area of the small Rybne lake came across a lonely village house. [...] Not far from it, the soldiers discovered a site surrounded by a high wooden fence.

[...] After a few minutes of painstaking digging, from a depth of about half a meter, the shovels lifted up parts of the clothes, which amazed everyone; there was a strong stench of decomposition. A terrible find! Shovels bumped into dead bodies, hideous mutilated corpses. The place of murders by the GPU was found.

A third attempt at another location on an area of approximately 15,000 square meters produced the same result. Again, the corpses of people killed with inhuman cruelty by GPU executioners. [...] we are sure that the entire territory is one mass grave, in which the head of the GPU of Kyiv probably ordered hundreds of murdered men and women to be covered with earth... (Kollmus, 1941c, p. 3).

It should be noted that the majority mistakenly consider the date of publication to be 29 September 1941, and this issue was published on 30 September, as Karel Berkhoff (Berkhoff, 2015, p. 63) and Yuriy Shapoval (Shapoval, 2017, p. 58). This newspaper itself was not central or party, but primarily financial and economic, and its circulation was only 42,000 copies, while the party newspaper “Völkischer Beobachter” had a circulation of about one million in 1940.

However, on 29 September 1941, an article by the military correspondent A. Peter Kollmus appeared in other mass media. In particular, the Austrian newspaper “Innsbrucker Nachrichten” in its supplement “Neuelte Zeitung” (no. 190) published the article *GPU-Morde auch in Kiew aufgedeckt* (Kollmus, 1941b, p. 7), the text of which completely coincides with the above. The same is observed, for example, in the newspaper “Wiener Neueste Nachrichten” (Vienna, Austria) (Kollmus, 1941a, p. 2). Yes, in “Innsbrucker Nachrichten” the message is dated 29 September, and in “Wiener Neueste Nachrichten” – 29 September.

Articles from Dutch newspapers are an equally valuable source for covering the crime of the NKVD in the Bykivnia Forest. Thus, the newspaper “Nieuwe Apoldoornsche Courant” reported on 29 September 1941, that another burial site was found, where it was found that this city imagined itself as one mass grave. And according to the statement of a local resident, as early as 1939, the entrance to the site, surrounded by a fence, was forbidden (Ontzettende..., 1941a, p. 1). The same material is duplicated in the newspapers “De Limburger” (Ontzettende..., 1941b, p. 1) and “De Banier” (Ontzettende..., 1941c, p. 1) on 30 September 1941.

An article similar in content was published on 11 October 1941 in the Slovak newspaper “Stajerski Gospodar” (GPU-Morde..., 1941, p. 8).

The Ukrainian occupation publications did not miss the coverage of the burial place in the Bykivnia Forest. As early as 4 October 1941, the newspaper “Lvivs’ki visti” published the article *Zvirstva enkavedystiv u Kyjevi*, which actually reprinted the article of the military correspondent

Peter Kollmus, where the correspondent's impressions are quoted: "We stood shocked for some time over the open graves and in deep thought left this place of horror..." (Zvirstva..., 1941a, p. 3). Identical to the Lviv article was the same article on 16 October 1941 in the Lutsk newspaper "Ukrayins'kyy holos" (Zvirstva..., 1941b, p. 2), on 18 October in the newspaper "Rohatyns'ke slovo" (Zvirstva..., 1941c, p. 1) and on 26 October in the newspaper "Nashi Visti."

At the same time, the article "Shlyakhom morduvan'," which was published on 8 October 1941 in the newspaper "Ukrayins'ke slovo" (Shlyakhom, 1941, p. 2) is more well-known for the residents of Kyiv and scientists. It is slightly shorter in content than the previous ones, but is based on the material of Peter Kollmus and briefly describes the process of opening the graves of victims of political repression in the Bykivnia Forest.

There are also shorter notes about the terrible find by the German occupation authorities in the Bykivnyan forest. On 29 September 1941, the German newspaper "Rheinsberger Zeitung" (Rheinsberg) printed a small note *GPU. Morde in Kiev*, in which, referring to Peter Kollmus, he reports on the opening of the burial place of the victims of the Soviet regime near Kyiv on 21 September (GPU..., 1941a, p. 2).

The newspapers "Teltower Kreisblatt" (Berlin) (GPU..., 1941b, p. 2), "Baruther Anzeiger" (Barut) (GPU..., 1941c, p. 2), "Briesetal-Bote" (Berlin) (Die GPU..., 1941, p. 4), the Polish newspaper "Goniec Krakowski" (Kraków) (GPU szalało..., 1941, p. 1), or Ukrainian notes, for example *Ubyvstva v Kyjevi* [Murders in Kyiv] in the newspaper "Zhovkivs'ki visti," dated 5 October 1941 (Ubyvstva..., 1941, p. 2).

At the same time, in these articles we read, in addition to information about the location of the burial, its "finds," and the testimony of a local resident who allegedly "confirms" the crimes committed by the NKVD authorities. He was the watchman of the pioneer camp, Semen Ksenofontovich Dombovskiy (Dembovskiy), who took a direct part in the search and exhumation survey of graves in the Bykivnia Forest and was mentioned in most of the above-mentioned newspapers and who told the German authorities that:

the mentioned terrain was already fenced off from in 1939, he too could not get there, because 12 vovchurs were guarding the field. [...] The entrance to the GPU torture chamber was heavily guarded day and night, and vicious dogs did not allow anyone to come closer... (Zvirstva..., 1941a, p. 3).

He also added that:

in the last days of the Bolshevik terror, many NKVD trucks came to this place, bringing the bodies of the murdered (Shlyakhom, 1941, p. 2).

A certain source about the special area of the NKVD in the Bykivnia Forest, which details the information in the mass media, is the archival and criminal case of Semen Dombovskyi himself, who, in particular, during the interrogation on 22 April 1945, indicated that:

the German forced me and ten other prisoners of war to dig up one grave, having dug up this grave to a depth of approximately one meter, we found a blanket, when the German saw it, he looked and did not order further digging, but ordered to cover this grave with earth again (Arkhivno-kriminal'noye delo No. 3473..., 1937, p. 13zv.).

On 27 January 1989, the daughter of Semen Ksenofontovich, Antonina Semenivna Dombovska, supplemented this testimony, indicating that:

near the entrance to this territory, graves were already excavated, in which human corpses could be seen. [...] The Germans offered our family to start digging where they would show. They pointed to a freshly loosened patch of land and told them to dig in that place. I dug to the depth of the bayonet of the shovel, and it did not go any further because there was something there. Having cleared this place from the ground, I suddenly saw the corpse of a woman with a dead child in her arms. The corpses were not yet decomposed. There were other corpses under them. [...] The Germans photographed this entire procedure, and then one of the newspapers published a photo of these excavations, where my father was photographed against the background of excavated corpses [...] (Bazhan, Tronko, Booth et al. 2000, pp. 47-48).

However, Semen Dombovskyi himself during the interrogations denied his participation in the submission of material of “anti-Soviet slanderous content to the newspaper...,” emphasizing the fact that “I never told the Germans about such slander and why exactly there is a reference to my surname for me as well it’s not clear” (Arkhivno-kriminal'noye delo No. 3473..., 1937, p. 15-15zv.).

But this did not prevent the Soviet penal authorities, on 16 May 1945, with the decision of the Military Tribunal of the NKVD troops of the Kyiv region to sentence Semen Ksenofontovich to 10 years in the camps with deprivation of rights for 5 years and confiscation of property.

However, the culmination of anti-Soviet propaganda regarding the secret burial place of victims of political repressions in the Bykivnia Forest near Kyiv was the 1943 “New Vinnytsia” leaflet, which stated that:

Even during the dissection of mass graves in Vinnytsia, where 10,000 innocents were buried victims, similar places of mass massacre were found in other cities of Ukraine; a much wider burial field was discovered near Kyiv, a field of the same size near Zhytomyr, and a third one near Kamianets-Podilskyi. [...] Not only the Ukrainian people, who once again fell into the hands of the Soviets, but also the Russian and Belarusian peoples suffered brutal destruction. The size of this “new Vinnytsia” cannot be compared with the bloody terror of 1937–1938. This “friend Vinnytsia” proves to us that Bolshevism has not changed, neither in its ideas nor in its methods (Postcard “New Vinnytsia”, 1943)

But the appearance of this postcard is directly related to the unfolding of the wide anti-Soviet propaganda of 1943 after the detailed study of mass burials in Katyn and Vinnytsia.

Overall, propaganda efforts brought only conditional success to Goebbels, especially in relation to the German people, which not only deeply affected ordinary Germans, but also convinced them of the “barbarism” of the Red Army and the realization that “Germany’s own genocide” meant that the enemies would not show mercy to Germans (Ledford, 2012, p. 588). Examples of such impressions are given, in particular, in E. C. Król’s monograph (Król, 2006, p. 435).

On the other hand, with regard to the attitude of Poles or Ukrainians towards Soviet power or the worsening of relations between allies, the anti-Soviet campaign exposing the crimes of the NKVD, particularly in Katyn or Vinnytsia, did not achieve the success that was hoped for. Although the governments of Great Britain and the United States quickly concluded that it was the Stalinist regime that committed these crimes (Ledford, 2012, p. 587). According to J. Adamska, this campaign was the biggest propaganda failure of the Third Reich and did not bring any political benefits (Adamska, 2021, p. 416).

As noted by E. C. Król (2006) in his monograph on the Katyn burials, this anti-Soviet campaign of 1943 has a number of specific features, namely:

- 1) the use of this topic with increased intensity, concentration, and duration combined with a revival of interest in it;
- 2) flexible response to the course of events by the propaganda means of mass media, including tabloid newspapers, depending on the development of the situation and changes in policy, especially international;

3) using the so-called “shock method” in both oral (radio) and written (media) and illustrated (photo and video) forms when covering the crimes of the NKVD;

4) using various techniques of objectivity and credibility, including involving international experts, representatives of various international organizations and delegations in the study and inspection of burial sites;

5) diverting attention from military defeats and masking the Holocaust against Jews by accusing them of the execution of Polish officers;

6) the lack of moral sense and significance for the propaganda campaign.

The mentioned features were characteristic of both Vinnytsia, where almost similar processes took place, and certain moments in Lviv, but again not with the mass burials in Bykivnia Forest.

Analyzing the known publications today regarding the burial in Bykivnia Forest, we can state that the overwhelming majority of articles relate to the period of 29–30 September 1941 – 15 publications in German, Dutch, Austrian, and Hungarian languages, and in October 1941, at least four articles were published in Polish and Slovak languages. Additionally, seven articles in Ukrainian were published in October, four in November 1941, one in April, and one in May 1942.

However, only the “Ostdeutscher Beobachter” publication, which was issued in Poznań, published over 30 articles on Katyn from 14 April to 29 May 1943 (Król, 2006, p. 418). The “Völkischer Beobachter” newspaper printed articles on Katyn in every issue from 14 to 18 April 1943. According to Mieczysław Motas’ calculations, from April to August 1943, Katyn was mentioned about 42 times in European publications (Wolsza, 2018, p. 18).

If we consider the coverage of the mass burial in Vinnytsia, then Ukrainian publications such as “Vinnyts’ki visti” and “Nove ukrayins’ke slovo” collectively printed over 40 different publications, including those with photo illustrations. Additionally, publications appeared in other Ukrainian and German newspapers.

Additionally, E. C. Król notes that by the end of May, around 12 million copies of the Polish-language brochure by Andrzej Ciesielski *Katyń* (1943) and around 20 million leaflets about Katyn had been distributed in the occupied territory.

In general, one cannot disagree with Tadeusz Wolsza’s opinion that a characteristic feature of all publications regarding burial sites is their repetitiveness and the anonymity of their authors for the most part (Wolsza, 2018, p. 38).

At the same time, a general difference from the publications regarding Lviv, Katyn and Vinnytsia is that the publications regarding the burial in Bykivnia Forest and the exposure of the Soviet authorities’ crime in Kyiv were presented as ordinary news reports, authored by only one person, and relied on the “testimony” of only one person. To some extent, this demonstrates the restraint of Nazi propaganda in using this

information as an anti-Soviet propaganda tool, which was possibly partly due to the German authorities' own crime in Babi Yar, Kyiv at the end of September 1941.

Thus, the NKVD killing site in Bykivnia Forest became a specific object of anti-Soviet propaganda in the propaganda tabloid newspapers of Nazi Germany. The given materials are not exhaustive and reveal only a certain part of the existing documents regarding one of the largest burial places of victims of political repressions in Ukraine. Clearly demonstrating to us how the basic principles of Arthur Ponsonby's military propaganda were carried out in practice by one of the hostile parties against the other.

The materials presented provide a broader understanding of the source base in studying the secrets of the former NKVD special unit in the Bykivnia Forest and demonstrate certain peculiarities compared to the exposure of NKVD crimes in Lviv, Vinnytsia or Katyn. This pushes researchers towards more comprehensive studies in the future.

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