

virtues of her people. It is a mystery why the premier Catholic press in America should publish a book that, among other good things, is venomous and manifestly unfair in its treatment of the one nation in Europe that gave the Jewish people a home for many centuries, that produced more martyrs than any other for saving Jewish people during the Second World War, and that itself walked through a Via Dolorosa, producing more saints—and sainted priests—than any of its richer neighbors who however produced massive doses of insanity and unprecedented genocide.

In effect, the book simply discounts Polish Catholicism in the end as irrelevant to the modern West, and as such discredits the lives and witness of an army of Polish priests, nuns, and dedicated lay people who on every continent are bearing witness to the Catholic faith even as I write. A very interesting study of the oddly symbiotic relation of Germans and Jews, this is also a fairly intelligent example of Polonophobia in which “the Other”, the Pole, is simply created out of whole cloth, given Russian names, portrayed as a caricature. Dr. Beckett is capable of considerable subtlety in some areas, but in others she is brutally unfair. How unfortunate, since this is an interesting book but one in which ideology trumps the complexity and subtlety of truth. In this story Dr. Beckett has created a myth for her grandchildren in which they can be proud, but she has created it at the expense of other peoples’ grandchildren who are once again stigmatized by great untruths. It is a shame that Dr. Beckett and Ignatius Press have furthered a “big lie” mixed in, as is sometimes the case, with much perceptive truth. Some careful, intelligent, and knowledgeable editing would have helped make this book a tool for mutual understanding. As it stands, it is largely the same old treatment of Polish Catholics, myths created by comfortable and ignorant people thousands of miles away. ◇

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This issue opens with Barbara Polak’s interview with historians Sławomir Kalbarczyk and Witold

Wasilewski discussing the 1940 Soviet murder of 25,700 Polish military personnel. While historians know more about Katyń now than twenty years ago, Kalbarczyk rightly observes that “it is difficult to ascertain whether the current state of our knowledge is complete and which conclusions can be considered definitive. We will only gain that knowledge when the files of the Russian investigation are finally made accessible. We are only familiar with the contents of some of the files. The sixty-seven files granted us by the Russians have not in the least contributed to the state of our knowledge because the documents are irrelevant.” The historians also express concern over the fact that most publications on the Katyń Forest Massacre appearing in post-Soviet Russia are of a revisionist nature. These range from Yuri Mukhin’s outright denial of Soviet guilt to more nuanced and sophisticated “scholarly” attempts to whitewash and rationalize Bolshevik culpability. These disturbing trends do not bode well for Polish-Russian reconciliation in the near future.

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This is followed by Witold Wasilewski’s article about Western attitudes toward Katyń. These, the historian argues, have been a function of politics. As the Second World War raged, the Western Allies refused to accept Soviet culpability for the crime, and they castigated Poles for allegedly jeopardizing the unity of the anti-Axis alliance. However, Western delegates to the Nuremberg trials defeated the Soviet attempt to pin the blame on the Germans. During the cold war the political climate shifted in favor of exposing the truth about Katyń. In 1951–52 the U.S. House of Representatives launched a Congressional Commission (the Madden Commission) to investigate the communist atrocity. The Western Right generally favored commemorating and publicizing the truth about the massacre. On the other hand, the Left eschewed the subject for fear of straining relations with the communist world and handing political ammunition to the anticommunist Right. Yet in spite of the fact that not every Westerner wished to hear the truth about Katyń, the West nevertheless provided a venue to speak the truth freely.

Another article by Wasilewski analyzes the disinformation techniques employed by the Soviet

NKVD against their Polish captives. The objective was to prevent thousands of men slated for execution from anticipating the Soviet plan, rebelling and/or escaping. To this end the Bolsheviks disseminated rumors about possible shipments to Germany, France, or neutral countries. The Poles were even asked about their knowledge of foreign languages. The men were also vaccinated. Toward the end the Poles were also isolated from lower-level Soviet personnel to avoid leaks. Much like the Nazis who told their Jewish victims that the death trains would merely “deport” them to the “East,” the Soviets ensured that their Polish victims would be oblivious to their fate until the very end.

Krzysztof Persak provides a detailed description of the exhumation work performed during the years 1991–96 at Katyń, Mednoye, and Kharkiv, the three sites containing the remains of Polish and other victims of the communists, while Sławomir Kalbarczyk writes about the so-called Ukrainian List of Katyń victims. This document lists the names of 3,435 Polish citizens massacred in the Ukrainian SSR in 1940, and it was presented to the Poles by the Ukrainian Security Service (Sluzhba Bezpeky) in 1994. Aleksandra Pietrowicz from the Poznań branch of the IPN emphasizes that the province of Greater Poland (Wielkopolska) was also impacted by the mass killing of Polish officers, some of whom were natives of the region. Marek Klecel tells the story of the three Polish writers Józef Mackiewicz, Ferdynand Goetel, and Jan Emil Skiński who participated in the German-organized delegation to Katyń in April/May 1943.

Krzysztof Sychowicz describes a resurgent zeal to commemorate the Katyń Forest Massacre in communist-ruled Poland and the countermeasures undertaken by the secret police. The effort to preserve historical memory consisted of two main elements: services held by Catholic priests and illegal leaflets disseminated by such organizations as the Confederation for Independent Poland (KPN) and the Movement for the Defense of Civic and Human Rights (ROPCiO). This “reawakening” began in April/May 1980, thereby predating the birth of the Solidarity movement and undoubtedly paving the road for its rise.

Monika Komaniecka devotes an article to François Naville, professor of forensic medicine at the University of Geneva in Switzerland who represented a neutral state at the German-organized International Physicians’ Commission in 1943. Afterward he also testified in front of the Madden Commission in the United States. Naville was propelled both by a desire to defend the truth and sympathy for Poland as a

country torn between two powerful and rapacious neighbors. Grzegorz Kaczorowski, in turn, relates the testimony of Teofil Rubasiński (b. Teofil Dolata), a forced laborer on a German railroad repair crew (Bauzug no. 2005), who claims to have discovered the bodies of Polish officers buried at Katyń as early as 1942. Last but not least, Leszek Rysak describes the International Motorcycle Ride between various burial sites in Ukraine, Belarus, and the Russian Federation. Such an event, the author argues, provides a wonderful opportunity to popularize Katyń commemoration.

The April 2010 issue is a helpful resource concerning the Katyń Forest Massacre. The implosion of the Soviet system helped in discovering more about it. Filling in the remaining lacunae requires more cooperation from the governments in Moscow and Minsk. In Poland of 2010 the current governing party is wary of IPN’s autonomy and fears that the Kremlin may consider it provocative. In post-Soviet Russia a neoimperial obstinacy and a postcommunist version of the Stockholm Syndrome complement each other. Official “historical policy” reflects little desire to address the crimes of communism or to come to grips with wounds inflicted on the states neighboring the USSR. ♦

303 Squadron

The Legendary Battle of Britain Fighter Squadron

By Arkady Fiedler [1942]. Translated by Jarek Garlinski, Los Angeles, CA: Aquila Polonica, 2010. 368 pages. Numerous Second World War photographs. Nine appendices. ISBN 978-1-60772-005-8. Paper. \$21.95.

Adam R. Seipp

There is something enduringly and indelibly compelling about the Battle of Britain. Despite all of the necessary historical revision that has punctured and deflated the headier myths about “The Few” and their role in the course of the Second World War, the air battles over southern England in the summer and fall of 1940 retain much of their totemic power in the history of the twentieth century. If nothing else, the failure of the German assault on Britain convinced the British people and a great many onlookers that the Nazi tide could be turned.

A considerable number of pilots who flew in British fighters came from elsewhere. Britain in 1940 began to resemble a catchment area for those displaced and exiled