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**Soaring with Eagles: The Life and Legacy of Janina Lewandowska
The Only Female POW Killed in the Katyń Forest Massacre**

**by
Joshua Chlebowski
HIS 490 History Honors Thesis**

**Department of History
Providence College
Fall 2020**

For those women whose stories remain untold.

For those women whose contributions to history are overlooked.

"I remember from my childhood the story of the Katyń crime and its silencing as a point of entry into the suppressed Polish history when after martial law, with the samizdat flourishing, my father gave me an offset-printed publication with hardly legible type, saying, 'You have to read it tonight. Tomorrow I have to pass it on.'"

- Joanna Niżyńska

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

To my advisor, Dr. Manchester, thank you for your continuous feedback and encouragement throughout this process. Your faith in this thesis sometimes outweighed my own, and I am grateful for your assistance in navigating the hurdles that appeared along the way. You always took the time to explain and push me to challenge my ideas and writing style to ensure that this end result was the best it could be.

Thank you, Dr. Murphy, because without your patience and dedicated attention in reviewing each and every draft I created, this thesis would look remarkably different. Your comments and questions motivated me to engage further with the themes of this thesis in meaningful ways. Through the workshops you led, I became more conscious of my writing, allowing me to express my thoughts and analyses clearly and powerfully.

Additional thanks to Dr. Bennet and Professor Sung, who worked in conjunction with Dr. Manchester to curate the Maymester experience to Eastern Europe in 2019. It was on this trip that we toured the Muzeum Katyńskie and I first learned about the Katyn Massacre and took interest in its lasting impact on Poland. This curiosity continued to grow after the trip ended, eventually developing into this thesis on the only woman killed in the tragedy.

I would also like to express my sincerest appreciation for the efforts of countless library staff members in the Philips Memorial Library, whose efforts and communications with other institutions permitted me to examine a wide range of texts and source materials during the course of this endeavor. Without their help, this thesis would have struggled to reach the breadth of sources allowing this exploration to be as in-depth as it is.

I am extremely grateful for my family, whose words of motivation and support from the moment I decided to embark on this project kept me moving forward. Thank you for always believing in me and encouraging the pursuit of my dreams. It is because of you that I developed a passion for exploring the world and its rich histories. Thank you for providing countless opportunities to engage with these stories, be it visiting National Parks or local libraries. Words cannot express my utter gratitude for the love and support you continuously show me.

INTRODUCTION:

THE ENDURING NATIONAL TRAUMA OF KATYŃ

The plane went down in flames on the foggy morning of April 10, 2010, carrying with it more than ninety members of the Polish cabinet. Moments earlier, Polish President Lech Kaczyński had insisted that the plane land at the Smolensk airport in Russia, despite the pilots' warnings that attempting to land in this weather was dangerous.[1] In that moment, Kaczyński was focused on his mission to honor the victims of the Soviet-perpetrated Katyń massacre of 1940, and he refused to let the Russians deter him. The Russians had held a memorial service days earlier, inviting the Polish Prime Minister to share in their message of unity and move past the tragedy. Kaczyński strongly opposed this theme, wanting to remind Poles of the storied history of the massacre and Soviet coverup with a subtler tone of reconciliation.[2] While there is no evidence that Russian air traffic controllers attempted to delay Kaczyński's visit to the Polish memorial as part of some larger conspiracy, Kaczyński believed that the Russians were trying to prevent this speech.[3] This determination caused friction with the flight crew, who ultimately acquiesced to Kaczyński's demands to land. With the pilots flying at a lower altitude to avoid the fog, it only took a few moments before the plane crashed into the forest below. For the second time in seventy

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[1] Morgan Meis, "A Monument to Forgetting: How One Disaster At Katyn Helped Us To Move Past Another," *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 87 no. 4 (Fall 2011): 243, https://www.jstor.org/stable/44714236.

[2] Morgan Meis, "A Monument to Forgetting: How One Disaster At Katyn Helped Us To Move Past Another," 242.

[3] Morgan Meis, "A Monument to Forgetting: How One Disaster At Katyn Helped Us To Move Past Another," 243.

years, an upper echelon of Polish officials unexpectedly lost their lives in the Smolensk forests, leaving the Polish nation to mourn their deaths.

Just under twenty miles away from the burning wreckage lay the memorial that President Kaczyński intended to visit, a reminder of another massive loss of devoted Polish patriots. Pine and birch trees loom above the large, richly symbolic rust-colored rectangles with names of Polish soldiers etched on them. Stone slabs in the same rust color form pathways through the complex, leading visitors to mass grave pits and religious iconography.[4] There is a quietness to this place, an unshakeable somber atmosphere befitting the event it memorializes, the Katyń massacre. In this forest, in the Spring of 1940, the Soviet People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) executed approximately five thousand Polish military officers. Buried in seven mass graves, these soldiers remained undisturbed until a German officer discovered the pits in 1943.[5] The Nazis and Soviets provided contesting explanations for these mass graves, each nation blaming the other for these Poles' deaths. The politicization of these soldiers' fate endured for decades, and it was not until 1992 that the Soviets admitted their guilt as the perpetrators of the massacre.[6] For fifty years, the Poles lived without conclusive knowledge of what truly happened to their compatriots. The Soviet regime prohibited mention of the massacre in any location, private or public. Even more shocking to the Poles was the revelation that one of the victims was a female military officer: Second Lieutenant in the Polish Air Force, Janina Lewandowska. Indeed, the presence of her body was at the center of a fifty-year cover up.

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[4] "Katyn Memorial Complex," The Centre for Polish-Russian Dialogue and Understanding, accessed November 18, 2020 https://katynpromemoria.pl/?lang=en.; Morgan Meis, "A Monument to Forgetting: How One Disaster At Katyn Helped Us To Move Past Another," 241.

[5] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, ed. Anna M. Cienciala and Natalia S. Lebedeva (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 215, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[6] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, ed. Anna M. Cienciala and Natalia S. Lebedeva, 256.

For modern Poles, Katyń is more than another historical event studied in textbooks, it is a constant reminder of years of suppression at the hands of the Soviet Union. The Katyń massacre represents a denial of their history, not by their own government, but by a foreign power. Joanna Niżyńska, Professor of Polish studies at Harvard University, articulated the lasting echoes of this tragedy as "a symbolic national trauma, a center of gravity in the Polish sense of historical injustice that absorbed and conflated other traumas involving Russia and the sanitization of history."[7] This massacre cannot be commemorated with a simple wreath or speech, as befits many memorial ceremonies. As a national trauma, there is a cross-generational awareness of the enduring weight associated with the honoring of the victims. President Kaczyński undertook his trip to Katyń with this burden in mind. Yet instead of assisting with the gradual assuaging of the Polish spirit, this plane crash renewed the pain of Poles in Smolensk. The tragedy of Katyń seemed to follow the Poles into yet another century.

For the Polish people, the story of Katyń is emblematic of their long history of national displacement. The Poland of the twentieth century is a rather new geographic creation, its boundaries first recognized in a formal capacity in the 1919 Versailles Treaty. Prior to the establishment of these boundaries, the Commonwealth of Poland, established in 1569, included territory in modern-day Ukraine, Belarus, and Lithuania. The neighboring countries of Germany, Austria, and Russia led three partitions of the Commonwealth's territory between 1772 and 1795.[8] These powers utilized military force as well as diplomacy to justify and take control of their newly acquired land. The dwindling Polish state maintained its government structure, but its weakened

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[7] Joanna Niżyńska, "The Politics of Mourning and the Crisis of Poland's Symbolic Language after April 10," *East European Politics and Societies* 24, no. 4 (2010): 470.

[8] Hans Roos, *A History of Modern Poland*: *From the Foundation of the State in World War I to the Present Day,* trans. J.R. Foster (Alfred A. Knopf: New York, 1966) 3.

position prompted them to make political connections with Russia for assistance. European nations mainly ignored this land grab when it occurred, their inaction becoming a trend that continued into the Second World War.

To mitigate this sense of displacement, the Polish identity developed around a strong allegiance to the family, the nation, and the Catholic faith. At the center of these identities was the unique role of women in Polish life. Analysis of Janina Lewandowska's presence in the mass graves of Katyń provides an opportunity to examine the importance of a Polish feminine identity, particularly during the interwar period (1918-1939). Lewandowska's actions and legacy serve as a case study of the specifically Polish model of femininity and motherhood: the Matka Polka. Doing so places Lewandowska in the larger historical narrative, allowing one to see how exactly she had the opportunity to serve in the military, eventually finding her way to Katyń.

Among the most influential societal forces in Poland is the Catholic Church, contributing to both formal legislation and unwritten social codes. This association dates back to 1573, when Polish kings had to be Catholic to ascend the throne.[9] Though the Church and the royal hierarchy did not always agree, their Catholic affiliation gave them additional legitimacy as shapers of domestic policy. The eventual disappearance of the Polish state in the early 1800s also meant the Catholic Church lost its role in a governing body of the Poles. However, after over two hundred years, 43% of Poles identified as Christian or Catholic in 1772.[10] Bolstering the Church's influence in Poland was the sense of connection that citizens felt existed between Christ Jesus and their

[9] Magda Teter, *Jews and Heretics in Catholic Poland: A Beleaguered Church in the Post-Reformation Era,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 23, accessed November 6, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[10] Ronald Modras, "The Interwar Polish Catholic Press on the Jewish Question," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 548, no. 1 (1996): 177.

nation. Poles related to Christ's suffering at the hands of the Romans, facing a similar experience as foreign powers divided up their commonwealth.

The Catholic church exerted a significant influence on women's social positions in Poland, as it wielded the most potent symbol of feminine strength in Poland: the Virgin Mary. Heralded as a model for women to follow, her influence on the development of a Catholic feminine identity provides insight into Lewandowska's self-awareness. In 1656, the King of Poland, Jan Kazimierz, named the Virgin Mary as the Queen of Poland, solidifying her importance and association with the Polish state.[11] Mary became a symbol of Poland through both the strong religious presence in Poland and political declaration by Jan Kazimierz. This linkage of the Polish state directly to Mary increased women's responsibilities to their country. Women needed to be good mothers, but also demonstrate a strong sense of patriotism to their children and fellow Poles.[12] As the Queen of Poland, Mary was its protector, and the women of Poland shouldered this duty as a way of honoring this holy woman as well as serving their country. Modeling the values of Mary was a common part of Polish femininity, with the emergence of Marian worship solidifying the strength of the connection.

The conservative influence of the Church on Eastern European gender expectations reveals itself in women's involvement in Polish culture throughout its history. The domestic sphere was the woman's domain, raising the children a central part of her contributions to society.[13] The

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[11] Cathelijne de Busser and Anna Niedźwiedź, "Mary in Poland: A Polish Master Symbol," in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World,* ed. Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (Ashgate, 2008): 89.

[12] Anna Kuroczycka Schultes, "On the Margins of Religion/On the Forefront of Culture: The Image of the *Matka Polka* (Polish Mother) in Contemporary Poland," *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative* 5, no. 1 (2014): 270, accessed October 5, 2020, https://jarm.journals.yorku.ca/index.php/jarm/article/view/39342/35669.

[13] Autumn Libal, "Chapter 3: Women in Eastern Europe throughout History," in *Women in the World of Eastern Europe* (2004), 41-42, http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=pwh&AN=15674030&site=ehost-live&scope=site, EBSCOhost.

political world was traditionally out of reach for women, though there were notable exceptions, such as the Polish Queen Hedwige. This conservative legacy persists through the twenty-first century, with conversations about a woman's access to abortion and contraceptives remaining particularly contentious.[14] Despite increased participation in political processes and governmental affairs, societal judgements remain when women stray from traditionally prescribed roles. Historical examinations of women's positions in Polish society overwhelmingly focus on the expansion and contraction of rights since the beginning of Communist influence on the Polish state after World War II. However, this thesis focuses on the transformative environment of the interwar period as it pertains to women in Polish society.

Polish women's freedom and involvement in political scenes were markedly different from the beginning of the century to the years just before the Second World War. Women's literacy in Russian-partitioned Poland around the year 1900 developed mainly through education at home, though some girls attended government-established schools.[15] This education was not available to all, and there was a disparity in female literacy rates. Limited socialization outside of the home led women to Catholic-sponsored activities, such as rosary groups, to enjoy some level of free conversation with peers.[16] These freedoms, albeit limited, expanded over the next thirty to forty years, and by the start of the Second World War in 1939, women could participate in both

[14] "Back to the Kitchens in Eastern Europe?," *Green Left*, March 4, 1991, https://www.greenleft.org.au/content/back-kitchens-eastern-europe, accessed November 18, 2020.

[15] Robert E. Blobaum, "'The Woman Question' in Russian Poland, 1900-1914," *Journal of Social History* 35, no. 4 (2002): 803, https://www.jstor.org/stable/3790612.

[16] Robert E. Blobaum, "'The Woman Question' in Russian Poland, 1900-1914," 803.

professional organizations (such as landowners' associations) and political groups (such as the Polish Socialist party).[17]

Existing studies of the Polish women's liberation movement beginning in 1864 tend to center on the divisiveness of its leadership and audience. Those individuals privileged enough to lead this charge "attempted to reach the lower social strata, [but] in Poland, the main players were elite educated women."[18] Historians incorporate class into their analyses of the predominant schools of thought, conservativism and positivism. Where conservative thought aligned with women remaining in the private space of the home, positivists, "saw themselves as members of an oppressed national community."[19] The end goal for both conservatives and positivists was the elevation of their gender, but in decidedly divergent ways. Their writings extolled different actions, as conservatives recommended volunteer work in the fields of education and charity, while positivists encouraged a sense of individual development through educational pursuits.[20] Conservatives combined excellence at domestic roles and volunteer service to inspire meaningful changes within society. In turn, these efforts reinforced women's capacity to impact change, garnering additional respect and elevating their gender. The positivists turned inwards for a sense of liberation, while the conservatives expressed their femininity by showing their important contributions to society to garner additional respect.

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[17] Malgorzata Fuszara, "Between Feminism and the Catholic Church: The Woman's Movement in Poland," *Czech Sociological Review* 41, no. 6 (2005): 1063, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41132243.; Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers: Women in the Fight for Polish Independence," *The International History Review*, 19 no. 1 (1997): 18, https://doi.org/10.1080/07075332.1997.9640772.

[18] Malgorzata Fidelis, "'Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation:' Polish Women Intellectuals in the Cultural Construction of Female Gender Roles, 1864-1890," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no 1 (2001): 110, https://doi.org/10.1353/jowh.2001.0026.

[19] Malgorzata Fidelis, "Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation" 110.

[20] Malgorzata Fidelis, "Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation" 110.

Tracing the Catholic discourse on the Virgin Mary in Poland allows for a close examination into the core principles that contribute to the Polish model of femininity, the Matka Polka. Mary's appearance in Polish anthems, artwork, and legendary military accomplishments further links the Polish nation to Catholicism and the latter's influence on the defined role women play in Polish society. This thesis explores each attribute of this ideal, incorporating survey results of Polish female citizens to determine the enduring legacy of this prescribed identity. Contrasting the model of femininity with developments in women's political rights allows for analysis of female citizens' increased involvement in the public sphere. Women's participation in the First World War clarifies the precedents and societal attitudes which lasted into the interwar period. These developments contextualize the social conditions that permitted Janina Lewandowska's enlistment in the Polish Air Force.

After exploring the prevalent influences on Lewandowska's formative years, this thesis turns to the three Soviet Prisoner of War (POW) camps that housed the future victims of Katyń. The Kozielsk camp, which held Janina Lewandowska for the majority of her imprisonment, receives specific attention. Building upon memoirs of those fortunate enough to escape the tragic fate of other prisoners, this thesis explores the underground faith life in the POW camp and Lewandowska's involvement in it. Her production of wafers for the Catholic Eucharist provides an opportunity to analyze her adaptations and divergence from the established model of femininity. Although many elements of her day-to-day experience are lost, a cautious examination of rumors and whispers of her actions reveals her central role at the camp.

The discovery of Lewandowska's body provides insight into the geopolitical struggle exacerbated by the Katyń massacre. Analysis of both German and Soviet explanations of the massacre, and the threat her presence posed, emphasizes the delicate nature of World War II

alliances and international ranking of pressing matters. Polish response to the Allies' complacency toward the Soviet-perpetrated massacre demonstrates the origins of the Katyń massacre's impact on the Polish mentality. The conscious effort to hide Lewandowska's presence from the world by Nazi forces leads into analysis as to foreign expectations of Polish women's involvement in the military at the beginning of the war. The Soviets' conscious employment of suspect testimony produced by Soviet women further indicates assumptions as to innate qualities of women by predominant powers during the Second World War.

Exploring the life of Janina Lewandowska offers more than an expanded biography for a Polish woman, it allows for an in-depth examination of these components in Polish society during the interwar period. Although history remembers the contributions of the Emilia Plater Polish Independent Women's Battalion and the Polish Auxiliary Air Force (PLSK), the creation of these groups occurred midway through the Second World War. Studies of women's involvement in the early stages of the war, specifically their contributions to the September 1939 Polish defense, is virtually nonexistent. An examination of Janina Lewandowska's life contributes to filling this gap, revealing some boundaries women faced entering the military service before respected Polish generals, such as Wladyslaw Anders, sanctioned it. In risking her life and social standing, Lewandowska reinterpreted the traditional ideal of the Matka Polka, choosing to serve her country militarily. Though she adopted some of these maternal approaches when nurturing Polish patriotism while in the Kozielsk camp, she preempted this aspect of her identity with the decision to pursue military service before motherhood. She may not be representative of all women who made similar decisions, but her life makes a unique contribution to understanding social expectations of women as one of the first Polish women to involve herself in active service during World War II.

Internalization of traditional feminine responsibilities and a strong sense of national pride led Janina Lewandowska to serve her country as a member of the Polish Air Force at the outbreak of the Second World War. Although her capture by Soviet forces in late September of 1939 put an end to active military service, it did not stop the young officer from serving her country through other means. In the graves at Katyń, one finds the body of a female fighter pilot, as well as the story of a growing nation seeking to define itself, one woman's devotion to both her faith and fellow soldiers, and the supersession of country over the self.

CHAPTER ONE: "GAZING UPON THE SWORD":

THE MATKA POLKA AND FEMININITY IN INTERWAR POLAND

Staring at the Soviet soldiers and military hardware confronting her, one can only imagine what Second Lieutenant Janina Lewandowska must have thought. Three hundred miles from her home, her air base, and the city where she grew up, she faced an uncertain future. Her unit's attempt to evacuate East to safety was unsuccessful after the Soviet forces stopped their train.[21] Although she knew capture by the enemy was a possibility when she enlisted, her love of flying relegated this thought to the back of her mind. The Air Force allowed her to touch the skies while defending her country; and if capture was the cost, she would accept it. Her thoughts likely drifted to her husband, then snapped back when the Soviet officer waved her and Captain Jozef Sidor towards a commandeered ambulance. She would not continue with the rest of the 3rd Military Aviation Regiment.[22] Although miles away from home, Second Lieutenant Lewandowska carried with her the lessons of femininity absorbed from hours spent praying to the Virgin Mary and helping out at home. Whatever came next, she promised herself, she would face it with the strength and grace expected of Polish women.[23]

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[21] Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Lewandowska (Née Dowbor-Musnicki), Jania (1908-1940)," in *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard A. Cook (Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2006), 375.

[22] Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Lewandowska (Née Dowbor-Musnicki), Jania (1908-1940)," 375; "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The only woman in the Kozielsk camp," 34.

[23] This speculative retelling of Second Lieutenant Lewandowska's capture by the Soviets is based on various primary and secondary source documents about this particular event and relevant biographical details. The sources used are: Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Lewandowska (Née Dowbor-Musnicki), Jania (1908-1940)," in *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard A. Cook (Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2006).; Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Janina Lewandowska," in *Amazons to Fighter Pilots: A Biographical*

Born in 1908, Janina Lewandowska's father was Polish General Dowbor Muśnicki. She grew up in a Poland in conflict, both externally and internally.[24] Her father left when she was eight to command military units during the First World War, while she remained at home, immersed in the patriotic Matka Polka model. She likely heard about the young women in the Voluntary Legion of Women (OLK) not much older than herself, leaving to do their part to protect Polish lands. Coming of age in the largely Catholic province of Poznań, faith and Marian values were inescapable, further shaping her view of her particular role in Poland.[25] Lewandowska matured in a culture where women gained political rights, yet still fulfilled maternal responsibilities to the State and mirrored the stoicism of the Virgin Mary.

Although modern-day Poland is predominantly Catholic—in 2006, 95.1% of Poles self-categorized as Roman Catholic—this was not always the case.[26] As Poland's physical boundaries shifted, the religious demographic of its people changed as well. In 1772, Roman Catholicism accounted for 43% of the populace's religious affiliations, the largest bloc of practicing faithful. The remaining 57% included Uniates (33%), Russian Orthodox members (10%), Jews (9%), Protestants (4%) Muslims, Armenians, Frankists, and Old Believers (1%).[27] After the frequent partitions of Poland, it was difficult for any one government to establish itself and earn the loyalty

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Dictionary of Military Women, ed. Reina Pennington (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003).; *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989).

[24] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The only woman in the Kozielsk camp," 33.

[25] Lech Trzeciakowski, "The Prussian State and the Catholic Church in Prussian Poland 1871-1914," *Slavic Review* 26, no. 4 (Dec. 1967): 634.

[26] Dorota Hall, "Questioning Secularization? Church and Religion in Poland," in *The Social Significance of Religion in the Enlarged Europe: Secularization, Individualization and Pluralization*, edited by Olaf Müller, Detlef Pollack and Gert Pickel, (Taylor & Francis Group, 2012), accessed October 18, 2020, 126, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[27] Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland in Two Volumes,* vol. 1, *The Origins to 1795* (New York: Columbia Univeristy Press, 1982), 162.

of all its citizens. The consistency of the Catholic Church's organization, however, provided a steady voice of leadership that gained popularity amongst citizens. The structured organization of the Church provided stability, along with an identity that was not dependent on one's physical location.[28] With the establishment of the Polish state's borders at the conclusion of the First World War, the statistics shifted once again. The makeup of interwar Poland contained a little over three million Jews (about 10% of the population), while two-thirds of its citizens identified as Roman Catholic.[29] These new percentages reflected the beginnings of a Catholic-Polish narrative. Theologian Professor Ronald Modras notes that individuals referred to this recreated Poland as "zmartwychwstana," or "resurrected."[30] After surviving multiple partitions and numerous conflicts, this 'new' Poland was the survivor, emerging against all odds. This narrative points to a Polish trend of comparing the collective suffering of its citizens to the suffering of Christ Jesus. Out of this comparison came an increased dedication and faith to Him and the Church among Polish Catholic citizens.

As a nation with a large practicing Catholic population, one of the role models for citizens was the 'holy family,' composed of Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Catholic veneration of the Virgin Mary incorporates rosary prayers and feast days as a part of this devotion. The Polish celebration of Mary also dedicates two extra feast days to her.[31] Mary's affiliation with the Polish state was not only built upon belief of her saintliness but also her identity as Christ Jesus' mother. Her

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[28] Ronald Modras, "The Interwar Polish Catholic Press on the Jewish Question," *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* 548, no. 1 (1996): 177.

[29] Ronald Modras, "The Interwar Polish Catholic Press on the Jewish Question," 170.; Ran Abramitzky and Hanna Halaburda, *Were Jews in Interwar Poland More Educated?,* Working Paper No. 20-029 *(Stanford Institute for Economic Policy Research, 2020),* https://siepr.stanford.edu/sites/default/files/publications/20-029.pdf.

[30] Ronald Modras, "The Interwar Polish Catholic Press on the Jewish Question," 170.

[31] Anna Kuroczycka Schultes, "On the Margins of Religion/On the Forefront of Culture: The Image of the *Matka Polka* (Polish Mother) in Contemporary Poland," *Journal of the Motherhood Initiative* 5, no. 1 (2014): 266.

identity is twofold, comprised of a faithful guardian of Poland as well as a domestic archetype. Historian Brian Porter summarizes the dual function of Mary's linkage to Poland, stating "Mary is a powerful, sometimes militant protector of Poland; on the other hand, she is an exemplar of feminine domesticity. She guides the nation to victory even as she demonstrates how to sustain the national hearth and home."[32] Mary assists both the men and women of Poland in completing their civic duties, both in defending the nation and raising its future defenders.

The direction of prayers to Mary, as opposed to Christ Jesus or other saintly figures, comes out of a distinct Polish narrative. In this portrayal of Poland, a crucified Jesus represents the Polish state's continued struggles for recognition and unity, and Mary's presence at the foot of the cross is a comforting Divine assistance.[33] With this image strongly placed in Polish cultural thought, Mary became the intercessor for the Polish peoples throughout their history. Her perceived role in battlefield victories solidified her position within the Polish state as its Queen. Mary's invocation by Polish soldiers is well-documented, illustrated by her saving presence in both the *Bogurodzica* (one of the oldest Polish anthems from the 1400s) and the story of the Battle of Jasna Góra in 1655.[34] Sung at the Battle of Grunwald in 1410, the *Bogurodzica* calls upon Mary for assistance on the battlefield. In chorus, the Polish soldiers prayed that "Virgin, Mother of God,/Maria, honoured by God,/Your son's patroness,/Maria, chosen Mother!/Assist us."[35] The praises to Mary

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[32] Brian Porter, "Hetmanka and Mother: Representing the Virgin Mary in Modern Poland," *Contemporary European History* 14, no. 2 (May 2005): 153, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20081254.

[33] Katelyn McKenzie Sheffield, "Zofia Stryjeńska: Women in the Warsaw Town Square. Our Lady, Peasant Mother, Pagan Goddess" (master's thesis, Brigham Young Univeristy, 2013), 30.

[34] Cathelijne de Busser and Anna Niedźwiedź, "Mary in Poland: A Polish Master Symbol," in *Moved by Mary: The Power of Pilgrimage in the Modern World,* ed. Anna-Karina Hermkens, Willy Jansen, and Catrien Notermans (Ashgate, 2008): 88.

[35] Norman Davies, *God's Playground: A History of Poland in Two Volumes,* vol. 1, *The Origins to 1795,* 161.

are accompanied by a request that she assist with the defense of the Polish homeland against Teutonic Knights. Two hundred years later, Swedish forces attacked the monastery of Jasna Góra that contained a portrait of the Virgin Mary known as Our Lady of Częstochowa. The faithful Poles defending the structure reported a vision of the Blessed Mother preventing Swedish cannons from harming either the monastery or the Polish soldiers.[36] This story further defined Mary's role as a protectress in the Polish imagination.

The strong connection between Mary and the Polish state continued to affect Poland's culture in the ensuing centuries. Józef Bilczewski, the Archbishop of Lviv during the beginning of the twentieth century, observed that Marian "veneration has penetrated to the very foundation of the nation, has become a constituent part of the Polish soul, has left its mark on our traditions and customs…Our history, throughout the centuries, is virtually a history of Mary in the nation."[37] The Poles knew they had a special relationship with Mary and recognized its duration as a point of pride. Mary's intercessions and consistent invocation as a model for citizens to emulate solidified this connection.

[36] *Cathelijne de Busser and Anna Niedźwiedź*, "Mary in Poland: A Polish Master Symbol," 89.

[37] Brian Porter, "Hetmanka and Mother: Representing the Virgin Mary in Modern Poland," 152.

Figure 1. Our Lady of Częstochowa.

Paintings of the Virgin Mary took on a new meaning in Poland, reflecting more than simple religious adoration, but also her strong connection to the political struggles of the Poles. The most famous example of this is the painting of Our Lady of Częstochowa.[38] Already an important piece of Catholic imagery after the Battle of Jasna Góra, its continued survival, despite sustaining damages incurred in other military conflicts, solidified it in the Polish-Marian imagination.[39] In 1979, Pope John Paul II reiterated the significance that Mary has to the Polish nation. "If we want to know how this history is reflected in the hearts of the Poles," he stated, "We must put our ear to

[38] Luke the Evangelist, *Black Madonna of Częstochowa,* encaustic on panel, Jasna Góra Monastery, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Nuestra_Señora_de Czestochowa.jpg, accessed November 18, 2020.

[39] "Our Lady of Czestochowa," Polish American Center, accessed October 19, 2020, http://www.polishamericancenter.org/Czestochowa.htm.

this place. We must hear the echo of the Nation's life in the Heart of Its Mother and Queen."[40] His reference to the famed painting of Our Lady of Częstochowa was more than an exhibit of the painting's significance. He spoke of a larger connection, stating that in Mary, one finds and comprehends the Polish story.

Pope John Paul II's characterization of this recognition indicates the importance of understanding Mary as a formative part of Polish history. The painting represents the relationship that the Poles have with Mary. Two saber slashes across Mary's cheek result from physical damage, but the Poles continue to associate the painting with Polish efforts to defend an independent and faithful nation, despite numerous conflicts and defeats in battle. The injury to the painting becomes a part of the narrative, giving it an added dimension to Poles. With Mary sustaining that damage and continuing to intercede on the behalf of the faithful, she becomes all the more powerful and deserving of the Poles' praise and veneration.

For Polish women, Mary served as both a model for action and a confidante during moments of sorrow and sacrifice during motherhood. As someone who lost her own son, Mary was recognizable as someone mothers could turn to, knowing she felt the same pain.[41] The hymns and praises delivered to Mary by the Polish faithful coupled with a sense of sorority to raise Mary into a model for women to follow. Observing the pain Mary experienced allowed these women to see their sacrifices as mirroring hers. Mary gave her child up for God's purposes, and for Polish women, their children's martyrdom had the greater Polish society in mind. If Mary faced all those

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[40] John Paul II, quoted in Jan Kubrik, *The Power of Symbols Against the Symbols of Power: The Rise of Solidarity and the Fall of State Socialism in Poland,* (Pennsylvania: The Pennsylvania State University Press, 1994), 142, Google Books, accessed February 19, 2021.

[41] Karol Wojtyła, "Narodzenie Matki Bozej (Limanowa, 11 wrzesnia 1966)" in *Kazanie*, 116-23, quoted in Brian Porter, "Hetmanka and Mother: Representing the Virgin Mary in Modern Poland," 164.

pains and continued to trust in God, the reasoning suggests that women should do the same for Poland, despite their losses.

Mary's consistent presence facilitated female citizens' adoption of certain behaviors intended to mirror Mary's holy demeanor. Summarizing interviews conducted in 2005 with Northern Polish women, anthropologist Agnieszka Kościańska reiterates the present belief that, "women should be like the Madonna: humble, quiet, family-oriented, and responsible. Being silent and humble is a source of power for them and allows them to act beyond the private sphere, despite the fact that they fundamentally believe that women belong to the domestic realm."[42] The use of 'should' indicates the strong belief that Mary serves as an ideal for women. This conviction leads into a recitation of the specific traits, each of which convey a sense that women are not to be actively involved in the public realm. Polish women provide a certain stability by adhering to these maxims, supporting continued functionality within their country. Much like Mary, these women have a protecting, comforting, and orderly presence. By practicing these behaviors, women feel closer to Mary, their model. Nineteenth century Polish feminist Eleanora Ziemięcka was a strong proponent of the power enshrined in this intimate relationship with Mary, going so far as to claim that women would save society by following Mary's model of femininity.[43] Such a claim is possible because out of this sense of connection, a strength emerges, as Mary is with them. In respecting and imitating the Virgin Mary, Polish women influence change through her intercession. They may not be the individual actors, instead using their connection to Mary to fortify the nation in spirit.

[42] Agnieszka Kościańska, "The 'power of silence': Spirituality and women's agency beyond the Catholic Church in Poland," *Focaal: European Journal of Anthropology* 53 (2009): 67.

[43] Brian Porter, "Hetmanka and Mother: Representing the Virgin Mary in Modern Poland,"159.

Much of the Virgin Mary's identity emerges from her status as the "mother of God" in the form of Christ Jesus. As noted, the Polish state strongly identified with Mary, so it is unsurprising that motherhood was defined as central to Polish women's role and duty to their country. This status as the bearer of Polish children represents a convergence of the political and the religious in Poland: Mary's model as the ideal woman coupled with the necessity of raising patriotic fighters to combat threats to the country's survival. Both the government and Polish artists contributed to the merging of material and patriotic functions as exemplified to create a new model of Polish womanhood: "Matka Polka," translated as "Polish Mother."

This concept is more than a simple descriptor for Polish women who have children; it ascribes a political role for motherhood in Poland.[44] With constant existential threats on the minds of Polish citizens, patriotism grew in significance. The Polish poet, Adam Mickiewicz, was one of the first to formally align motherhood with patriotism by linking maternal duties to the raising of future martyrs. His seminal poem from 1831, "To a Polish Mother," informed Polish mothers of their sons' future fates, as "In battle—without glory—must he share/In martyrdom-with an eternal tomb."[45] In a somber, straightforward manner, the verse informs mothers of the inevitable fate of their children. Mickiewicz wrote this work after the failure of a Polish uprising against the Russian government. Though his words served primarily as a reaction to events in Poland at that time, they also solidify the connection between Mary and Polish motherhood, with his reflection that, "O Polish mother, ill must be his part!/Before the Mother of Our Sorrows kneel/Gaze on the sword that cleaves her living heart—/Such is the cruel blow thy breast shall feel!"[46] Drawing on the

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[44] Anna Kuroczycka Schultes, "On the Margins of Religion/On the Forefront of Culture: The Image of the *Matka Polka* (Polish Mother) in Contemporary Poland," 265.

[45] Adam Mickiewicz, "To a Polish Mother," *The Slavonic Review* 3, no. 7 (1924): 68.

[46] Adam Mickiewicz, "To a Polish Mother," 68.

strength of the Marian connection to the Polish state, Mickiewicz directs these mothers to their divine Mother for support and solace. He vividly described the Virgin Mary with a sword through her heart to illustrate how Mary connects to these mothers' present pains of losing their sons in combat.

A study of murals painted in a Warsaw town square by Zofia Stryjeńska in 1928 shows the dissemination of this idea. Her depictions of women echo the sentiments of Mickiewicz, based partly on models of the Virgin Mary and the inevitable maternal mourning.[47] Stryjeńska's *Women Carrying Water* murals show women holding jugs that spill water onto the earth below her, symbolizing a rebirth of the Polish land. This spilled water also connects to the roles of the martyrs in Mickiewicz work. Just as the water falls and nourishes the earth, so the sacrifices of these individuals provide for the furtherance of the nation's existence. Stryjeńska's women hold these heavy containers with life-giving water on their shoulders, all while it seems to fruitlessly escape the confines of the pottery.[48] The water, like the Polish children, leaves its "home," allowing the earth below the woman's feet to continue supporting life. These paintings also have golden backgrounds, similar to religious Byzantine art pieces.[49] Subdued connections to other religious imagery further the link between Stryjeńska's women and the Virgin Mary, model of the Matka Polka. Despite the elapsing of time between Mickiewicz and Stryjeńska's works, their thematic consistency reinforces the lasting quality of this image of motherhood across generations.

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[47] Katelyn McKenzie Sheffield, "Zofia Stryjeńska: Women in the Warsaw Town Square. Our Lady, Peasant Mother, Pagan Goddess," 54.

[48] Katelyn McKenzie Sheffield, "Zofia Stryjeńska: Women in the Warsaw Town Square. Our Lady, Peasant Mother, Pagan Goddess," 50.

[49] Katelyn McKenzie Sheffield, "Zofia Stryjeńska: Women in the Warsaw Town Square. Our Lady, Peasant Mother, Pagan Goddess," 51.

In emphasizing this responsibility of Polish mothers, Mickiewicz's poem also focuses on a secondary identity, wherein these women suppressed their suffering to raise children with strong senses of patriotism.[50] The inescapable martyrdom their children faced also meant that mental anguish was an inevitable component of women's existence. Women had to contain these emotions, however, in order to fulfill their duty effectively. Internalizing this fear and sadness allowed for the maximizing of patriotic education of Polish sons, untainted by any "selfish" sorrow or attempts to prevent them from defending the country. The personal aligned with the political, and women became reliable defenders of the Polish identity. As historian Stefania Bernini notes, "it was Polish wives, mothers, and grandmothers who guarded the traditions, provided the social infrastructure, comforted the activists, and told their men folk where their duty lay."[51] This responsibility made women central figures in the furtherance of Polish society, allowing them to instill in their children the values that all Poles needed to serve their country with pride. The work occurred within the domain of the home, which meant that women could continue their everyday domestic tasks without interruption. From the government's perspective, allowing women to play such an important role in the life of the nation was acceptable as long as they remained faithful to their traditional responsibilities.[52] There was no lessening of tasks for these women, as the house still needed upkeep and the family still needed its meals. Mothers performed an important role, but they remained under the purview of male oversight in both domestic and social settings.

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[50] Stefania Bernini, "Mothers and children in post-war Europe: Martyrdom and National Reconstruction in Italy and Poland," *European Review of History: Revue Européenne d'Histoire* 22, no. 2 (2015): 248.

[51] Stefania Bernini, "Mothers and children in post-war Europe: Martyrdom and National Reconstruction in Italy and Poland," 247.

[52] Anna Kuroczycka Schultes, "On the Margins of Religion/On the Forefront of Culture: The Image of the *Matka Polka* (Polish Mother) in Contemporary Poland," 265.

The added responsibilities that the Polish state both explicitly and subtly gave to women were not without consequence. After divorcing her husband, the government confiscated Polish intellectual Eliza Orzeszkowa's property in 1864 as a retaliatory measure for abandoning a pathway to motherhood through her marriage.[53] Such reinforcements contributed to a constant sense of isolation for women, as society judged their lives by their success at becoming mothers to sons who would serve the country. This sense of loneliness manifested in multiple ways, the first being the attainment of the "mother" title. For those unable to conceive or carry a child to term, shame was an ever-present emotion, compounded by the elevation of motherhood as the ideal contribution of women for their country. Unwanted pregnancies inspired additional negative emotions, as the struggle between personal and national preference led to guilt.[54] There was little room for a woman to decide whether she wanted to be a mother. Since "having children was…the expression of a certain attitude, the recognition of motherhood as a social role," the absence of children did not reflect positively on a woman's perceived level of patriotism.[55] Though the expectation that women become mothers was not unique to Polish society, Polish women's intense internalization of this tenet reflected the inescapable quality of this expectation within society. Whether in the political realm, with the linkage of motherhood to furthering patriotic ideals, or in Catholic influences, with the devotion to the Virgin Mary, deviance from this identity attracted negative community attention.

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[53] "Malgorzata Fidelis, "'Participation in the Creative Work of the Nation:' Polish Women Intellectuals in the Cultural Construction of Female Gender Roles, 1864-1890," *Journal of Women's History* 13, no 1 (2001): 114.

[54] Agnieszka Imbierowicz, "The Polish Mother on the Defensive," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* no. 1 (2012): 148.

[55] Magdalena Grabowska, "Bits of Freedom: Demystifying Women's Activism Under State Socialism in Poland and Georgia," *Feminist Studies* 43, no. 1 (2017): 162.

Those women who attained the maternal title struggled to reach out and form a community of support with other mothers, resulting in feelings of isolation. Although expected to flourish in both motherhood and domestic tasks, Polish women's success at the former was more important to the Polish nation. Adopting the identity of "Polish motherhood" continued to appear in Polish women's reflections on their responsibilities. A 2002 survey reveals the lasting impact of this model, with respondents noting that, "without my sacrifice my family would not manage," and that, "I bear on my shoulders so many things, that they would be enough for several other women."[56] It is tempting to view these comments as recognition of women's importance and their centrality in the Polish community, but language reveals the internalized pressures of societal expectations. 'Sacrifice,' for instance, carries a weight that words such as 'work' or 'dedicated efforts' do not. There is also the association of 'sacrifice' with Polish motherhood, the understanding being that one's children may be sacrificed in combat to protect the country.

The idea that no other single woman could bear the weights that this mother shouldered further indicates an internalized sense of competitiveness. Rather than normalizing the sharing of tasks, the Polish state's model of motherhood led some women to adopt a mentality where they felt that they should handle the responsibilities of motherhood alone.[57] The Catholic affiliation of Mary's motherhood offered no solace either, as the Virgin Mary raised Christ Jesus in her family unit, not soliciting assistance from others. Luke's gospel provides an exception to this, when Mary and Joseph employ assistance from companions to find him during the time that he remained behind in Jerusalem. Even this moment is a rare occurrence, outside of the usual realm of motherhood and child-rearing. Reaching out to another woman, whether family or a friend, was a

[56] Agnieszka Imbierowicz, "The Polish Mother on the Defensive," 141.

[57] Agnieszka Imbierowicz, "The Polish Mother on the Defensive," 151.

struggle, as it meant admitting difficulty with living up to the Matka Polka standard of motherhood. For the most part, Polish mothers shouldered the responsibilities of raising patriotic children and maintaining the house without requests for assistance.

Although the Matka Polka model maintained its strength in Poland during the interwar period, variations on this ideal manifested themselves in Polish culture, allowing women to branch out into more active political and military participation. Granting Polish women the right to vote late in 1918 kept with the trend of global powers expanding their definitions of who made up the electorate in their respective countries. Women could first vote in 1919, and 66.9% of Polish women participated, as compared with 71.5% of men. This figure dropped only slightly nine years later, with 65.4% of women participating in a 1928 election.[58] The consistency of female voter turnout indicates that gaining this form of involvement in shaping their country was significant, despite the reality that many continued to adhere strictly to the Matka Polka model. Eligibility to leave the domestic setting and actively participate in the political realm as a voter led into the 1921 expansion of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland to provide equal political rights for both sexes under the law.

Despite gaining more political rights and representation, historian Anna Żarnowska notes that, "This did not signify, however, a complete and consistent liquidation of legal limitations discriminating against women, most obvious within civil law."[59] Civil law, relating to spousal relations, prevented a full equality between male and female Polish citizens. The prevailing structure for civil law in Poland drew from the French's 1804 Napoleonic Code, under which,

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[58] Anna Żarnowska, "Women's Political Participation in Inter-war Poland: opportunities and limitations," *Women's History Review* 13, no. 1 (2004): 58, https://doi.org/10.1080/09612020400200382.

[59] Anna Żarnowska, "Women's Political Participation in Inter-war Poland: opportunities and limitations," 64.

women's wages, profits, and property were under the husband's control.[60] Utilizing this antiquated doctrine to govern the civil relations and divisions of duties between Polish men and women posed a point of contention. Attempts to rework this civil law for equality proved difficult in Poland. Women gained some control over property, but only in specific situations where a husband or father had minimal to no involvement in the purchasing or maintenance of it. In the event that a woman held a job, she also gained control over her earnings.[61] However, with the constantly reinforced Matka Polka identity, such occurrences were unlikely. Inclusion of those particular women's rights stemmed from a belief that any such gains resulted from a sustained demonstration that women were patriotic members of society.[62] Despite granting political equality, the belief that women were inferior and had to prove their loyalty to earn rights persisted. Such an idea contradicts the belief that the Matka Polka excels at raising patriotic children and is herself a model patriot. Members of committees dedicated to revising the civil law held contradictory beliefs, resulting in few actual changes to the code. Polish law slowly advanced women's opportunities to leave the home, but such legal concessions did not outweigh the continued active encouragement of traditional motherhood.

As women gained new spaces for participation in the public sphere, these areas emphasized women's duties to their nation rather than as a space for socialization. Each of the more than eighty women's organizations founded throughout Poland during the interwar period had a varying focus,

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[60] Bonnie G. Smith, *Changing Lives: Women in European History Since 1700*, (Lexington, D.C. Heath and Company, 1989), 121.

[61] Michał Gałędek and Anna Klimaszewska. "'Crippled Equality': The Act of 1 July 1921 on Civil Rights for Women in Poland," trans. by Maja. Tr. Jaros, *Acta Polonaie Historica* 113 (June 2016): 250, http://dx.doi.org/10.12775/APH.2016.113.09.

[62] Michał Gałędek, and Anna Klimaszewska, "'Crippled Equality': The Act of 1 July 1921 on Civil Rights for Women in Poland," 241.

be it religious, social, or professional.[63] Religious groups upheld the status quo, providing an opportunity for women to participate in activities such as praying the rosary. This action was both social and also a reminder of the Virgin Mary, allowing the Church to retain its influence over women even during their breaks from the domestic side of their lives. Professional organizations, such as the United Circle of Women Landowners (ZKZ), focused on a higher responsibility to the state by preserving their Polish identity while also completing the work.[64] Demonstrating proficiency in professional or athletic organizations was simply another way to serve their country. Rather than reflect upon their individual capabilities, any task or achievement these women completed belonged to the Polish state, indicating the communal nature of work it provided its citizens. Women's contributions to society reflected back on the country at large, leaving them little space for themselves.

With the expansion of individual women's participation in politics and social organizations, spaces traditionally reserved for men began to open, including in sports and military service. Beginning from the practical reasoning that healthy mothers birthed healthy children who grew into healthy Polish citizens and martyrs, the Polish government encouraged women's physical activity. Many of the social expectations on women emerged from the preoccupation with tomorrow's citizens and the future of the country, which traced back to the mothers.[65] Sports groups, such as the Warsaw Oarswoman Club (WKW), experienced an increase in membership

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[63] Malgorzata Fuszara, "Between Feminism and the Catholic Church: The Woman's Movement in Poland," *Czech Sociological Review* 41, no. 6 (2005): 1063, https://www.jstor.org/stable/41132243.

[64] Nameeta Mathur, "The New Sportswoman: Nationalism, Feminism and Women's Physical Culture in Interwar Poland," *The Polish Review* 48, no. 4 (2003): 452, https://www.jstor.org/stable/25779426; Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers: Women in the Fight for Polish Independence," *The International History Review*, 19 no. 1 (1997): 18, DOI: 10.1080/07075332.1997.9640772.

[65] Nameeta Mathur, "The New Sportswoman: Nationalism, Feminism and Women's Physical Culture in Interwar Poland," 445.

during the interwar period. The WKW went from 268 members in 1928 to 692 in 1931, inspired by the societal view that such an activity was a perfect way to demonstrate physical strength and patriotism.[66] Competitions, ranging from tennis to riflery, allowed women to socialize outside of the home, with the added benefit of demonstrating the superior health and fitness of Polish women. The victors of such events could not escape their domestic identities, as "Female athletes were portrayed as good mothers and wives, and the newspapers and periodicals often showed pictures of sportswomen with their children."[67] The press, which was an extension of State power and reinforcer of cultural perceptions, continued to remind all that women were, first and foremost, preservers of the future of Poland through childbirth. Gradual expansion of activities outside the home for women to enjoy did not diminish those aspects of life which society deemed central for women, with the reflection of the Matka Polka model in each new option.

Along with the more traditional sports activities included in the physical culture of Poland, women could participate in events such as gliding and parachuting. Women who entered the realm of air sports received a different level of respect, often given the title of 'queens of the air.' This honor is striking as it bestows the 'queen' identifier, also given to Mary in her connection to the Polish state. The power given to women that participated in these activities still connected to the overarching model for womanhood in Poland. Recalling that the expectation of women involved in these sports was that they still raise a family, this title indicates that these women demonstrate a superior quality in their physicality and dedication to the state. As historian Nameeta Mathur notes, "Women in aviation…successfully undermined traditional biological conservatism

[66] Nameeta Mathur, "The New Sportswoman: Nationalism, Feminism and Women's Physical Culture in Interwar Poland," 452.

[67] Nameeta Mathur, "The New Sportswoman: Nationalism, Feminism and Women's Physical Culture in Interwar Poland," 455.

according to which women possessed shortcomings and defects…Polish female aviators demonstrated abilities of rational reasoning, physical strength, and confidence."[68] Whereas success in other sports received praise, aviation set women apart due to the complexity of the activity. Although these female participants demonstrated a capacity for reasoning and strength, the persistent belief in the inferiority of women prevented this development from having a larger impact on women's social standing. Yet the distinctions and verbal honors given to these women were still significant, existing in the greater context of the gradual recognition that women's capacity for activities traditionally deemed 'masculine' was the same as their male counterparts.

During the First World War, women took a more active role in the military defense of the nation, although they could not completely shake the gendered expectations of society. Women participated in a range of sectors of military work, including espionage, firing squads, nursing, and performing laundry and culinary tasks for soldiers.[69] Certainly, their involvement as spies and members of firing squads is surprising considering the stringent social barriers for women in military affairs, but these roles were not quite as radical as they seemed. The reason women were effective spies was that their male targets did not make much of female citizens, leading to lapses in security procedures and subsequently overheard conversations by these spies.[70] Use of firearms and participation in firing squads also seems to break with traditional gender norms. However, with the developing women's physical culture in Poland, it was not unusual for women to possess

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[68] Nameeta Mathur, "The New Sportswoman: Nationalism, Feminism and Women's Physical Culture in Interwar Poland," 453.

[69] Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," in *Aftermaths of War: Women's Movements and Female Activists, 1918-1923*, edited by Ingrid Sharp and Matthew Stibbe (Leiden, BRILL, 2011), accessed October 18, 2020, 268, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[70] Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers: Women in the Fight for Polish Independence," 24.

skills in riflery. With these two exceptions, women's involvement was what one might expect, carrying out duties also done at home, such as cooking, cleaning, and caring for others.

The establishment of the Voluntary Legion of Women (OLK) as an active branch in the Polish military provided women the opportunity to participate in more combat-related activities during World War I. Members' duties ranged from laundry and nursing to guard duty and active combat.[71] Membership in this service group was relatively low during the war, with approximately 350 women participating.[72] Between 1919 and 1921, enrollment increased to 4000 women, likely owing to the sustained geopolitical conflicts around the new nation.[73] Approximately 39% of those enrolled were twenty-one years old or younger.[74] The age factor provides an interesting point of analysis for motivations of enlistment. Though rationales are certainly mixed, younger women had less experience than the older subset with social condemnations for diverging from maternal roles. Without these additional years of exposure to these gendered expectations, younger women found the prospect more lucrative and less costly in terms of feminine reputation. Fewer such negative experiences coupled with a sense of optimism that a postwar Poland would be a place of liberation and equal rights, contributing to this trend in OLK enlistment.[75] Although this is not an overwhelming statistic, the data reveals that some women did depart from the traditional roles of nurses and cooks to assist their country in a more nontraditional manner.

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[71] Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," 272.

[72] Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," 270.

[73] Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," 273.

[74] Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers: Women in the Fight for Polish Independence," 26.

[75] Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers: Women in the Fight for Polish Independence," 24.

The pushback to the OLK's creation and work came from multiple sectors of society. Some military generals complained that women should remain in auxiliary roles instead of active combat ones. Polish General Józef Haller cited traditional gender norms in his opposition to the OLK, stating that "In the Polish army, as in any other army, a woman may in the future serve in auxiliary units which are suited to women's nature, such as nursing, secretarial work (typing) or household duties. She must be unconditionally excluded from the regular units of the Polish army as well as from bearing arms."[76] Few women's associations not aligned with the liberation movement lent support to this group, and the press was another source of criticism.[77] The critical voices are a reminder of how unusual this group was and the challenge it posed to the status quo. With women's professional and social organizations widely refusing to celebrate this new development, one gets the sense of the depth to which gender norms were imbued. Even the women's liberation movement was not the most excited about the OLK, as evident in their reticence to endorse it.[78] This distinct lack of societal praise indicates that motives for joining were predominantly patriotic and not self-serving. A willingness to bear the constant critiques, even from groups one might expect to issue endorsements, is telling of participants' character. Though the nation was lukewarm to their service, they carried on with it because service to the country came first, even before one's name and reputation.

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[76] Helena Ceysinger, "Ochotnicza Legia Kobiet. Szkic historyczny" (Lwów: 1921): 26, quoted in Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," 271.

[77] Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," 271; Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers in Poland," 27.

[78] Robert M. Ponichtera, "Feminists, Nationalists, and Soldiers: Women in the Fight for Polish Independence," 27.

After a series of dedicated efforts in the First World War, women's involvement in military affairs began to wane during the interwar period. With a return to political 'normalcy' came an expectation that women return to their homes. The ingrained cultural maxims that women were mothers first before servicewomen facilitated this restoration of Polish gender norms as the need for military forces decreased.[79] Global conflicts caused temporary changes in the established division of responsibility and involvement in political life. This phenomenon did not occur without some pushback from women, though the result was seemingly inevitable due to the strength of gendered cultural expectations.

Helena Ceysinger, a servicewoman in the OLK who served during World War I, attempted to expand military training for all female Polish citizens. Linking her argument to the model of the Matka Polka, she claimed that "it is necessary that through a woman – the educator of future generations and the organiser of family hearth – the strength and seriousness in embracing the demands of life is inserted into the nation."[80] If women had military training, they could better fulfill their duties to the Polish state, acquiring a new skill set that could be utilized in times of conflict. Their central role in furthering the health of the Polish state was a given fact, and Ceysinger believed that such an expansion of responsibilities would only have a positive effect. Nonetheless, women's military service organizations gradually disappeared from the national stage.

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[79] Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," 274.

[80] Helena Ceysinger, "Ochotnicza Legia Kobiet. Szkic historyczny" (Lwów: 1921): 62, quoted in Sylwia kuźma-Markowska, "Soldiers, Members of Parliament, Social Activists: The Polish Women's Movement After World War I," 273.

When the Second World War broke out in September 1939, there were no formal female military organizations. Prominent service groups such as the Polish Women's Auxiliary (PSK) and Emilia Plater Battalion came into existence two to three years later. The responsibilities of those who served in such units once again ranged from nursing to serving as sentries.[81] Women's participation inspired mixed responses, with some praising their patriotism and others bemoaning the fact these women abandoned the hearth for a man's place.[82] The formation of these units occurred while the Polish government was in exile and was likely a reflection of the Polish government's willingness to do whatever it could to reclaim the Polish homeland. The PSK and Emilia Plater Battalion were not widely available for women to join at the start of the conflict, and there are few occurrences of Polish women's military participation during the early stages of World War II. Those who entered the service had renowned skills demonstrated through competitions or training courses, or through their personal connections to the military. It was easier for women to join the military forces later in the war, simply enlisting in organizations sponsored by the government or prominent military generals.[83]

The complex intertwining of traditional Matka Polka values and women's expansions into historically male-dominated spheres remained in Lewandowska's mind throughout high school, where she earned certifications and set records in both parachuting and gliding.[84] Exceptional

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[81] Józef Gula, *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain*, (Great Britain, Henry Ling Limited, 1993), 107 and 112.

[82] Józef Gula, *The Roman Catholic Church in the History of the Polish Exiled Community in Great Britain*, 108.

[83] Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Polish Independent Women's Battalion, milia Plater (1943-1945)," in *Women and War: A Historical Encyclopedia from Antiquity to the Present*, vol. 2, ed. Bernard A. Cook (Santa Barbara, ABC-CLIO, 2006), 474.

[84] Łukasz Zalesiński, "Metal Plane," *Polska Zbrojna*, April 2020 Special Edition, https://zbrojni.blob.core.windows.net/pzdata2/TinyMceFiles/jednodniowka_katyn_04_2020_ang.pdf, accessed

performance in these pastimes reflected the strength and health expected of ideal Polish mothers, a fact that Lewandowska well knew. In addition to pursuing interests in physical activities that tested strength, she studied radiotelegraphy in Lviv.[85] These ventures demonstrate that Lewandowska had at least a passing interest in military affairs. Women's involvement in aviation and riflery pastimes were not unusual, but they were not necessarily popular. Her decision to pursue this activity indicates her self-awareness of both her physicality and intellect, two skills that a military career could highlight.

When Lewandowska enrolled in a radiotelegraphy course in 1937, Polish relations with Germany were civil. Early in the year, both Hermann Göring and Adolf Hitler denied territorial ambitions along the Polish border.[86] Existing tensions between the two countries over the Nazi leadership in the Free City of Danzig appeared to be under control. Starting with the German annexation of Austria in 1938, Polish-German relations began to deteriorate. Though the Germans soothed tensions between Poland and Lithuania, their seizure of the Sudetenland in Czechoslovakia caused the Poles to grow nervous for their sovereignty.[87] During 1939, the Polish government solidified its alliances with key European countries, such as France. Polish communications in the months preceding the 1939 invasion left officials with hope that foreign intervention would be swift to reduce the destruction to their country.[88] Lewandowska's entrance

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December 19, 2020, 5.; Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Janina Lewandowska," in *Amazons to Fighter Pilots: A Biographical Dictionary of Military Women,* ed. Reina Pennington (Westport: Greenwood Press, 2003), 257.

[85] Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Janina Lewandowska," 257.

[86] Gerhard L. Weinberg, "German Foreign Policy and Poland, 1937-38," *The Polish Review* 20, no. 1 (1975): 6, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27920627.

[87] Gerhard L. Weinberg, "German Foreign Policy and Poland, 1937-38," 18.

[88] Michael Alfred Peszke, "Poland's Military Aviation, September 1939: It Never Had a Chance," In *Why Air Forces Fail: The Anatomy of Defeat,* edited by Robin Higham and Stephen J. Harris, 26, University Press of Kentucky, 2016.

into radiotelegraphy and the Polish Air Force occurred in a period of national tension with neighboring states. There was no active military conflict, but the threat of one was ever-present, and as a high-schooler, Lewandowska was aware of these issues. Her patriotic inclinations appear to have factored into her decision to take passions for parachuting and apply them to national defense.

Despite seeming to push the boundaries and occupy a newly opened space for women in Polish society, Lewandowska did not stray from cultural expectation of marriage, wedding pilot Mieczyslaw Lewandowski early in 1939.[89] Up until this point in her life, Lewandowska remained within the gender norms accepted by society. She demonstrated exceptional physical fitness, married at an acceptable age, and lived in a religiously faithful manner. If the Second World War had not occurred, it is possible she would have continued to follow expectations by bearing children and raising them to be just as patriotic as her father was. The outbreak of the war, however, presented Lewandowska the opportunity to put her skills and connections to the test.

A member of the Polish Army reserve since 1937, Lewandowska transferred into the active 3rd Aviation Regiment at the "ground echelon of Air Force Base No. 3" in August of 1939.[90] Her ability to join these military units was a result of several factors: her father's prominence in the Polish military, her skills in aviation, and her knowledge of radiotelegraphy. It is difficult to state which of the three reasons proved the most persuasive to the military forces who allowed her to volunteer, but she was undoubtedly a qualified individual. There are no records of her attempting to use her family name to give her an advantage, though the shadow of her father's name possibly

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[89] Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Janina Lewandowska," 257.

[90] Łukasz Zalesiński, "Metal Plane," 5.; Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Lewandowska (Née Dowbor-Musnicki), Jania (1908-1940)," 375.; Krzysztof Łagojda, "Second Lieutenant Janina Antonina Lewandowska – the woman pilot," Burial Mound, Katyn: Pro Memoria, accessed November 1, 2020, https://katynpromemoria.pl/wersja-alternatywna/barrow/?lang=en.

played an unintentional role. With women's involvement limited this early in the conflict, Lewandowska's inclusion in military aviation was an unusual exception. In joining the air force, Lewandowska was not wholly a pioneer, as the existence of the OLK years earlier indicates women once had a presence in military branches. For this specific time, though, Lewandowska was among the first women to volunteer. The patriotism inspiring this decision would last through the remainder of her life and represents her belief that country came first.

Lewandowska's military career was brief, though she rose to the rank of a Second Lieutenant. The specifics of her unit's capture in Soviet-controlled territory during September of 1939 are unknown.[91] Existing stories detailing Lewandowska's plane being shot down and her capture as a result are heroic and popular, but the veracity of them is questionable.[92] The ensuing transports to the Soviet prisoner of war camps, first to Oshtokav and then to Kozielsk, were some of the final voyages she took. Just over six months later, Janina Lewandowska boarded another moving vehicle, this time taking her to an execution site deep in the Katyń Forest.

[91] Łukasz Zalesiński, "Metal Plane," 5.

[92] Kazimiera J. Cottam, "Janina Lewandowska," 257.

CHAPTER TWO: "JEANNE D'ARC REINCARNATED": LEWANDOWSKA'S PRESENCE AND LEGACY IN THE KOZIELSK CAMP

Janina Lewandowska glanced around, checking to ensure none of the Soviet guards were close enough to observe her covert work. Satisfied that no one could see, she mixed a small amount of flour, salt, and water together on a kitchen table.[93] She carried the hopes of imprisoned, faithful Poles as she worked quietly. If all went according to plan, she would leave the kitchen that night with a small number of wafers to use in a celebration of the Eucharist.[94] She risked much by furthering spiritual life in the Kozielsk camp, directly disobeying religious restrictions issued by the guards. Recalling the group of imprisoned priests sentenced to solitary confinement for continuing to hold masses, Lewandowska knew a similar punishment awaited her if caught.[95] If the risks scared her, she hid this well, directing her efforts towards her sacred mission. Finishing the task at hand, she gathered together the completed wafers. Stepping out of the kitchen into the cold night air, she headed to her cabin. She passed the structures housing approximately five thousand other Poles, many captured within a month of the commencement of World War II hostilities.[96] In her hands she carried the spiritual food that would renew the fighting spirit in her

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[93] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk,* 2nd ed., trans. Anna Marianska (Warszawa, Poland: Hector, Printing and Publishing House, 1993), 23.

[94] Łukasz Zalesiński, "Metal Plane," *Polska Zbrojna*, April 2020 Special Edition, https://zbrojni.blob.core.windows.net/pzdata2/TinyMceFiles/jednodniowka_katyn_04_2020_ang.pdf, accessed December 19, 2020, 5.

[95] S. Swianiewicz, "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, Religious life in the camp," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 29.

[96] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, ed. Anna M. Cienciala and Natalia S. Lebedeva (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 29, ProQuest Ebook Central.

fellow imprisoned Poles, reminding them of their homeland during this captivity in the desolate Kozielsk Soviet prisoner of war (POW) camp.

Polish soldiers taken prisoner by the Soviet forces during the September 1939 campaign found themselves sent to one of several camps, including Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Oshtokav. Located near the Eastern border of Soviet Russia, these POW camps held approximately 15,000 Polish soldiers and officers.[97] One-third of the prisoners held in these particular POW camps in mid-1941 became the victims of the Katyń massacre. The Kozielsk and Starobielsk camps predominantly contained officers in the Polish military, whereas the Ostashkov camp held officers as well as Polish police and intelligence officers.[98] Each of these camps was built on the grounds of a Catholic monastery, and the Soviets converted monastery structures or chapels into housing for their prisoners.[99] The People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) and affiliated guards interviewed the prisoners, and then attempted to re-educate them by distributing Moscow newspapers, news bulletins, and large printed propaganda.[100] Polish POWs also engaged in physical labor, digging roadways, tidying the camps, and transporting ice blocks and earth for various NKVD projects.[101] These conditions were the standard for Soviet-run prisoner of war camps in the early 1940s.

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[97] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 1. The Facts," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 18-20.

[98] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 1. The Facts," 20.

[99] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 1. The Facts," 20.

[100] S. Swianiewicz, "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The NKVD team at work," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 23.

[101] Józef Rychalski, "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, Work," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 43.

Since religion often involved gatherings, NKVD guards and supervisors were wary of its presence in the camp. They worried that worship could allow POWs to plan and stage a revolt. To prevent these gatherings, guards regularly patrolled the camp and checked inconspicuous bushes for hidden worshippers.[102] The dedication to examining any possible gathering demonstrates how seriously guards took the presence of religion. These searches accompanied the removal of high-ranking religious officials before major holidays. This extreme action was not the first time the NKVD punished religious leaders, having sent several priests into solitary confinement for ignoring these directives. Separating prisoners from their religious leaders palpably impacted the morale of those remaining, with one prisoner comparing the experience to being orphaned.[103] This weakening of spirit indicates that POWs relied on the religious presence to strengthen their resolve and resist the efforts of the Soviet guards.

The Soviets also attempted to reeducate the Poles in these camps, making them sympathetic to Communist beliefs. The Poles' active faith life posed a threat to this work. While religions like Christianity attribute a power and benevolence to God, Soviet Russia attempted to characterize Communist party figures like Joseph Stalin as all-powerful. It was difficult to convince the faithful to abandon their established beliefs, setting up a conflict between clergy members and Communist party leaders.[104] The Communist state preached atheism, a politically conducive identity that allowed them to exert a greater influence over their citizens. Though Stalinist propaganda in newspapers and radio broadcasts attempted to further these re-education efforts, religion continued

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[102] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* ed. Władysław T. Bartoszewski, trans. Naftali Greenwood (Oxford, UK: Blackwell Publishers, 1992), 64.

[103] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk,* 23.

[104] Lewis H. Siegelbaum, *Soviet State and Society Between Revolutions, 1918-1929*, (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1992): 157, https://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.05410, EPUB.

to pose a barrier to the Soviets' success.[105] Stanislav Swianiewicz, a prisoner of Katyń, cited his faith as one central reason for surviving the camp experience.[106] Though Swianiewicz's experience may not represent the sentiments of all prisoners, it reveals a prevailing mentality in the camps. These spiritual beliefs gave the POWs a source of renewal for their mental strength in resisting Soviet reeducation efforts. Praying to their God gave the soldiers solace and courage to remain loyal to their home country despite their imprisonment. With the strength of the POWs' convictions, the Soviets were correct to perceive religion as a threat to their agenda. In the absence of these religious leaders or the ability to convene, the sense of loss left prisoners more vulnerable to the Soviet pressures.

Soviet efforts to prevent formal group religious worship succeeded, but they struggled to effectively prevent individual prayers and more informal participation in religious life. In removing these demonstrations of faith, camp authorities showed their lack of comprehension for the religious dedication of the Poles. Even without clear leaders, both Jewish and Christian Polish prisoners worshipped their God and found solace in each other's presence. Since the guards strictly enforced the prohibition on religious celebrations, prisoners adapted their worship. Originally, prisoners shared a communal prayer each evening but made this practice more individualized as time progressed. Rather than praying aloud, those kept in these cramped quarters adopted a few minutes of silence.[107] During this time, prisoners could pray to their God for their intentions. Each

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[105] S. Swianiewicz, "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The NKVD team at work," 23.

[106] Elizabeth V. Haigh, Stanisław Swianiewicz : Eulogy, Stanisław Swianiewicz collection, Saint Mary's University Patrick Power Library, Halifax, NS, http://library2.smu.ca/handle/01/26729#.X5dsui9h3GI, accessed October 26, 2020.

[107] S. Swianiewicz, "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, Religious life in the camp," 29.

prisoner prayed individually while surrounded by other who did the same, allowing them to experience the same sort of communal sensation they knew from prior services. One prisoner noted the incorporation of whispered song, another adaptation from usual worship practice.[108] Despite lacking the full-volume expressions of praise, prisoners used these moments to connect to each other and their religion. These adapted practices were almost undetectable to Soviet guards. The Poles did not lose their religious sentiments but made necessary changes to stay true to those figures that assisted their people throughout history.

Jewish prisoner Salomon Slowes' reflection on the psychological effects of the Kozielsk housing conditions demonstrates how important maintaining religious practices was for the POWs. Slowes wrote that many of the prisoners living in the main residence, a converted chapel, "were driven into an even deeper state of depression," due to the conditions, and that, "[he] was overtaken by a feeling of hell on earth whenever [he] found [himself] in that place, and flickers of dancing fire in the gloom would conjure, Dante's words: 'Abandon all hope, ye who enter here.'"[109] The irony of a Catholic chapel evoking a sense of hell in its inhabitants underscores how the communal evening prayer allowed these prisoners to reclaim a vital part of their identity that the Soviets attempted to suppress during Kozielsk captivity. These brief moments each evening helped combat the sense of depression and desolation, nourishing the Poles' fighting spirit.

The religious identities in Kozielsk reflected the percentages of the larger Polish nation. Historian Simon Schochet found that 15% of the total prisoners held in the Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Oshtokav, were Jewish. At Kozielsk specifically, there were 200 Jewish prisoners, or about

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[108] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 65.

[109] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 53.

5% of the total.[110] These soldiers continued to worship in secret, despite NKVD efforts to prohibit such practices through impromptu searches of gathering spaces in the camp. When the NKVD removed high-ranking religious figures shortly before Christmas Eve, 1939, they included the Chief Rabbi of the Polish army in their roundup.[111] Despite the knowledge that Christmas had more significance to the Christian soldiers and that Hannukah had already passed, the NKVD took no chances, locking the religious leaders in a tower before removing them from the camp.[112]

The Soviets did not separate soldiers based on their faith, housing both Christian and Jewish service people in the same Church structure. Although this decision came from a need to maximize space, it also made it more difficult for sects to gather and worship according to their own specific traditions. The prisoners would need to overcome dogmatic differences to celebrate religious ceremonies. A different structure held non-military Jewish prisoners, including doctors and intellectuals.[113] Presumably this division assisted with organizational efforts and roundups of the different groups of prisoners for deportation. The Soviets later removed these individuals when they converted the Kozielsk camp into an officer's camp, sending them to other POW camps in Western Russia. Since prisoners without a military connection were the only ones kept separate, the basis for the housing distinction was the prisoner's occupation, not their religion. To the Soviets, the specifics of a prisoner's religion did not matter much in their overall camp structure.

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[110] Simon Schochet, *An Attempt to Identify the Polish-Jewish Officers who were Prisoners in Katyn*, (New York: Holocaust studies program, Yeshiva University, 1989), 8.; Simon Schochet, "Polish Jewish Officers Who Were Killed in Katyn: An Ongoing Investigation in Light of Documents Recently Released," in *The Holocaust in the Soviet Union: Studies and Sources on the Destruction of the Jews in the Nazi-Occupied Territories of the USSR, 1941-45,* ed. Lucjan Dobroszycki, and Jeffery S. Gurock, Armonk: Taylor & Francis Group, 1993, 239, accessed October 26, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[111] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 52.

[112] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 52.

[113] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 54.

With the limited space, the majority of prisoners and low-ranking officers received the same consideration for placement. The Soviets seemed to have more concerns about separating generals from lieutenants than Christians from Jews. Though the religious identities were an issue, officer classifications posed a greater threat to Soviet efforts to control their new prisoners. Keeping ranks separate prevented the Polish military hierarchy from organizing and rising up in the camps. Although the Soviets paid attention to the threats religion posed, it was not their foremost concern in the organization of the camp.

Although the exact percentage is not known, the preponderance of individuals in the Kozielsk POW camp were Catholic, as evident in Jewish prisoner Salomon W. Slowes' observation that, "Catholic religious consciousness was deeply entrenched among the prisoners."[114] As a member of a different faith community, Slowes' comments offer the benefit of having fewer biases than reflections by a Catholic prisoner. The dedication to a faith life was not simply present but actually engrained in the prisoners' mentalities. Catholic prisoners in particular took risks to adapt their worship life to the conditions of the camp. Using natural resources, such as tree bark, the more artistic of the soldiers carved images of Mary and Jesus.[115] The subject matter reflects the larger Polish narrative, indicating that while imprisoned, these soldiers turned to the spiritual figures they worshipped throughout their lives.

Zdzisław Peszkowski, a young soldier held in Kozielsk, documented the effect that the presence of religious leaders had on prisoners in the camp. He recollects that after the removal of the priests in Kozielsk, "We were so terribly orphaned. While they were among us you could

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[114] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 65.

[115] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 65.

always go up to them during a walk, make your confession, talk, and you'd feel better."[116] Religious life in the camp depended on these seemingly innocuous walks that guards permitted, unaware that they allowed for their charges to connect, retaining their religious values and dedication to Poland. The removal devastated the rest of the prisoners, and this likening to orphans indicates the depth of the guidance provided by these religious leaders. These men could ease the consciences of afflicted soldiers, provide a listening ear for concerns or anxieties, and always bring them back to their Catholic beliefs, invoking a connection to their homeland in the process. Religion, however discretely celebrated, constituted an important part of life in Kozielsk, and the removal of known figureheads dealt a heavy blow to those remaining.

As a large part of Catholic worship is the celebration of the Eucharist, imprisoned Catholic Poles worked to fulfil this part of their faith. The abandonment of elaborate rituals that accompany transubstantiation during Mass was necessary, though not ideal. Commonplace items as tumblers and saucers replaced chalices and patens, but these substitutions did not dampen the spirit and determination of the Catholic faithful to commune with God.[117] To bring these moments to fruition, Kozielsk prisoners relied on a variety of strategies to acquire the necessary components for the bread and wine elements. The fruit ingredients, such as grapes—or, more likely raisins, with fruit a luxury[118]—were rare gifts from sympathetic guards.[119] To obtain other ingredients, prisoners utilized connections to employees in the kitchens, placing their trust in men and women that could easily inform their Soviet superiors. Some prisoners resorted to theft to acquire the key

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[116] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 23.

[117] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 21.

[118] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 16.; Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 32.

[119] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 21.

supplies.[120] Even these techniques involved fewer risks in comparison to the prisoners who used their direct access to the kitchens as part of their forced labor to secretly bake wafers for Eucharistic services.[121] Such dedication serves as a reminder of these prisoners' devotion to God, as the NKVD banned religious displays of any sort and were quick to take retaliatory action.

The Eucharist receives the majority of attention during worship services. Its distribution is standard for all churches, even if the wine is not offered to the faithful in attendance. As such, acquiring the flour to create the wafers was central to underground Catholic life in Kozielsk. The effort put into gathering the flour, whether stolen or gifted to the prisoners, reflected their dedication to turning the simplest ingredients into one of the holiest components in their worship practice. When Zdzisław Peszkowski asked, in Polish, for some flour to make communion wafers, a Soviet kitchen staff member with limited Polish vocabulary, "stopped for a moment and then without a word he brought the flour."[122] It took a second for this employee to translate the Polish request and then to comprehend its weight.

Though impossible to know all of the thoughts that ran through this Russian guard's mind during the brief pause that Peszkowski observed, the pause itself points to a greater inner conflict. To give the flour to a prisoner constituted a conscious violation of the anti-religious position of the camp and could result in punishment at the hands of the NKVD. His eventual gift of the flour to Peszkowski shows that there were sympathetic Russians employed in the camps. The expression of these sentiments was discrete by necessity so as to avoid trouble from Soviet guards. It also points to the power conveyed in Peszkowski's simple request of flour for communion wafers.[123]

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[120] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 21.

[121] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 83.

[122] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 21.

[123] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 21.

Despite the language barrier, this man recognized both the literal words spoken as well as their significance for the prisoner. It is impossible to tell whether the eventual submission came from sympathy for this poor Polish prisoner or from a fear of retribution from his perception of a Divine Power, but the result was the same, and the flour changed hands.

Simply possessing flour was not enough to hold a Mass, as its form needed to carry at least some similarity to the wafers these Poles saw in their home parishes. Turning the flour into a wafer of some sort was not an easy task, and their efforts to do so early on in their imprisonment reflect inspiration from their Jewish compatriots. As Peszkowski notes in his memoirs, these improvised wafers, "were a bit like matzos but at least we had something."[124] Improvising Eucharistic wafers in this manner was not ideal, but for these faithful prisoners, the ability to offer any bread product to their God superseded adherence to traditional procedures. When Peszkowski writes that "at least" the Catholic Poles had a makeshift wafer, he conveys a sense of settling for these matzo wafers. The efforts of these prisoners in turning simple ingredients into a vessel to commune with Christ Jesus was indicative of the dedication to their faith. There was also a poetic note to it all, in that these Catholics connected with traditions learned from Jewish Poles as well as Catholicism's development from Judaism—the harsh reality of the prison camps could not overtake the strength of these religions.

Although the Catholic prisoners managed to produce matzo-wafers, records indicate that their celebration of the Eucharist was inconsistent. Part of the challenge was the acquisition of the resources and production of wafers, both lengthy processes considering NKVD scrutiny. The other challenge came with the deportation of the priests, the only ordained individuals who could

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[124] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 23.; Matzo, a traditional Jewish bread associated with Passover, is an unleavened bread. It is made of simple ingredients such as flour, water, oil and salt.

facilitate the transubstantiation of these wafers into the Body of Christ. Since religious leaders were present until Christmas of 1939, it follows that they were the ones leading the Catholic masses. After the deportation, however, the soldiers did not cease their worship. As with the modifications made to the wafer considering the circumstances, the soldiers understood that there was a certain amount of adaptation that needed to occur. The Christmas Eve mass, documented by Zdzisław Peszkowski, involved consumption of a special Eucharistic wafer, despite it not being consecrated by a priest.[125] The Poles preferred a modified Eucharistic sacrament to no sacrament at all. They managed to continue some religious celebration despite setbacks by NKVD anti-religious policy.

While many details of Lewandowska's life are contested, all accounts agree on at least one fact—that she was an active participant in the secret religious life in Kozielsk. Her involvement went beyond simply appearing at the Masses or conversing on doctrine with fellow soldiers, as she worked to bake the wafers used in the Eucharistic rite.[126] This fact reveals that she worked in the kitchens of Kozielsk in some capacity, which allowed her to produce the wafers, or at least hold some involvement in the process. Such work did not go unnoticed by the camp guards, and she underwent multiple searches of her room and person as they worked to determine how their prisoners managed to subvert anti-religious regulations and efforts within the camp.[127] Her dedication to the religious life of the camp was as strong as that of her compatriots; she lived in a separate physical space from the rest of the prisoners simply due to her sex, but this did not keep

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[125] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 22.

[126] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The only woman in the Kozielsk camp," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 34.

[127] *Hearings before the Select Committee to Conduct an Investigation of the Facts, Evidence, and Circumstances of the Katyn Forest Massacre*, Investigation of the Murder of Thousands of Polish Officers in the Katyn Forest near Smolensk, Russia, 82nd Cong., 2nd sess., April 16-19, 1952, 848.

her from assisting and gathering with other Catholics in the camp. [128] The barriers put in place by the NKVD and camp guards could not prevent their prisoners from continuing to participate in traditions they committed to heart.

These actions in producing Eucharistic matzo wafers had an overt religious connection, as her work directly allowed for worship services to continue and for Catholic prisoners to participate in the rites they grew up with, along with a more symbolic connection between Lewandowska and the Virgin Mary. Just as Mary brought Christ Jesus into the world and allowed for the Divine to directly engage with His creation, Lewandowska's work in the kitchens of Kozielsk brought the Christ into contact with these Poles. Though it is difficult to say whether other prisoners involved in these underground services adopted this perspective, it does mirror the national ideals that mothers raise good, patriotic, and Catholic citizens.[129] The connection between Mary and the Matka Polska is not coincidence, since Marian devotion constitutes a large component of Polish religious life. In assisting with the production of these Eucharistic matzo wafers, Lewandowska helped keep Catholic worship alive and a part of these soldiers' lives, in a certain sense fulfilling her duty as a Polish woman to raise and instill in others a devotion to God and to Poland. Her work did not follow this societal expectation to the letter, as she was not a mother by virtue of bearing children, but in adopting this title symbolically she helped imprisoned soldiers maintain their religious devotion and nationalism in the Kozielsk camp.

In addition to her work in the Kozielsk camp assisting with the production and distribution of the Eucharistic matzo-wafers, Lewandowska continued to fulfil the socially mandated role of nurturing patriotic spirit through her sheer presence. As Zdzisław Peszkowski, another active

[128] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The only woman in the Kozielsk camp," 34.; Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story*, 64.

[129] Agnieszka Imbierowicz, "The Polish Mother on the Defensive," 142.

prisoner in the Eucharistic matzo-wafer production, notes, "Real awareness that Janina was among us awoken some sort of warm familial feelings. This reminded us of our dearest home and family - one woman and we longing for Poland. This intimate longing, each separate and all together."[130] The repeated use of the "we" and "us" indicates that her presence affected both those she worked with and those she simply encountered in the day-to-day camp life. She reminded these men of home and family; and these were more than happy memories, they were the reasons that these soldiers enlisted and chose to fight for their country. Certainly, a part of this reminder involved thoughts of wives and children, but the greater connection was to Poland. Though soldiers could write letters home, between censors and camp procedures, there was no guarantee that their loved ones would receive or be able to respond to the messages.[131]

Lewandowska's presence was a reminder of home, and through it, each of these soldiers felt a renewed connection to Poland, reinforcing a motivation and desire to serve their country with pride through whatever hardships they experienced. After seeing Lewandowska in the camp, Slowes reflected, "onlookers came away with the feeling that Jeanne d'Arc had been reincarnated in their midst."[132] The allusion to another female whose inclusion in the military was groundbreaking demonstrates the symbolic role Lewandowska held. Joan of Arc famously rallied the French soldiers to fight for their country, something Lewandowska also did through her various efforts. There is little evidence that Polish citizens outside of those imprisoned knew of Lewandowska's presence in the Kozielsk camp; her primary impact was on her fellow prisoners.

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[130] Zdzisław Peszkowski, "Jedyna kobieta - ofiara Katynia," Tygodnik Wileńszczyzny, 8-14 marca 2007 r. nr 10 (wydanie internetowe nr 339). *Translation by author:* "Prawdziwa świadomość, że jest wśród nas Janina, budziła jakieś serdeczne, rodzinne uczucia. To przypomniało nam dom rodzinny, naszych Najdroższych - jedna niewiasta i my tęskniący za Polską. To intymna tęsknota każdego z osobna i wszystkich razem."

[131] Rev. Msgr. Zdzisław Peszkowski, *Memoirs of a Prisoner of War in Kozielsk*, 24.

[132] Salomon W. Slowes, *The Road to Katyn: a soldier's story,* 64.

Similar to Joan of Arc, Lewandowska used her faith to unite other soldiers around their home country. Religious belief is tied to patriotism, an association present in the defined Matka Polka role. Assisting with matzo-wafer production allowed Lewandowska to keep other prisoners' spirit up, furthering a sense of community despite harsh conditions and NKVD rules about gatherings. This comparison to the saintly French soldier reflects her effectiveness at doing this, since Joan of Arc succeeded at uniting the French army, boosting morale, and securing victories for her country. Though Lewandowska's work took place in a POW camp, she managed to maintain a sense of community despite the misery in Kozielsk.

Lewandowska was an anomaly in the Polish air force and in the Soviets' eyes, though this fact did not contribute to her execution in the Katyń Forest. Her efforts in supporting other POWs, reminding them of home and furthering a covert religious life to spiritually reinvigorate other prisoners, were short-lived. From the affixing of Stalin's signature to the execution order in March 1940, Lewandowska's fate was sealed.[133] It was not her work making and distributing Eucharist wafers that led her to a grave in the Katyń forest, but her classification as an officer based on her military title of 2nd Lieutenant. The only prisoners left in Kozielsk were officers, though their specific ranks varied. Believing freedom was near, Lewandowska boarded the trains with hundreds of other Polish POWs. No liberation awaited at the end of the railroad tracks, only a forest disturbed by recently dug, partially filled graves. Marched to the edge of one such pit containing her comrades' bodies in April of 1940, Lewandowska's final thoughts are left to the imagination.[134] To the Soviets that held her in place while the executioner readied his gun, she was

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[133] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 121.

[134] George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre Of 1940: Truth, Justice, and Memory* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2005), 108, ProQuest Ebook Central.

simply another prisoner to execute.[135] Moments after the gunshot rang out, gravity pulled her body into the grave, and the NKVD team proceeded on with the next prisoner. Deep in the Katyń forest, Lewandowska's body soon lay hidden from the world—at least, that was the Soviets' hope.

[135] George Sanford, *Katyn and the Soviet Massacre Of 1940: Truth, Justice, and Memory,* 108.

CHAPTER THREE: WHEN THE JOURALISTS REMOVED THEIR HATS: THE DISCOVERY AND IMPLICATIONS OF LEWANDOWSKA'S BODY

Silence fell over the crowd gathered around a recently unearthed set of bodies. The mass graves discovered by the Germans in the Katyń forest in 1943 promised to give the journalists present a story that would increase circulation numbers and earn them the approval of their editors. The German authorities believed that by allowing journalists to write about their experience at the graves, international opposition to Nazi policies would lessen and the new focus on a Soviet massacre would weaken the Allies' relationship with the Soviet Union. All of these hopes dissipated in one unexpected moment, as the graveside workers uncovered a female body in uniform. The German hypothesis, that Jewish-Bolsheviks killed these Polish officers, did not take into account any possibility of a female officer.[136] Lewandowska's presence threatened to undermine the German's storyline; after all, no one at that graveside imagined a woman could serve as an air force pilot in the Polish military.[137]

In June of 1941, Nazi Germany launched Operation Barbarossa, invading Soviet Russia and breaking the Molotov-Rippentrop Nonaggression Pact. By July of that year German forces had conquered the Smolensk territory, home of the Katyń forest. Early in 1943, a German officer heard rumors of a mass grave in the forest, interrogated local Russians to determine if the whisperings had any truth to them, led an exploratory dig to confirm the presence of bodies, and

[136] Benjamin B. Fischer, "The Katyn Controversy: Stalin's Killing Field," Central Intelligence Agency, last modified June 7, 2008, https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/winter99-00/art6.html.

[137] Joseph Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1951), 128.

then informed his superiors.[138] The German government ordered the opening of the Katyń graves on March 29, 1943.[139] As initial reports crossed the desk of the Minister of Nazi Propaganda, Joseph Gobbels, he realized the opportunity this discovery offered. If they could prove it was a Soviet-perpetrated massacre, the Nazis could drive a wedge between the Allied forces, weakening them just enough to ensure a German victory. Eleven days later, on April 9, Goebbels received approval to send delegations to the Katyń site with the intention of using its findings for propaganda purposes.[140] A strategically scheduled news bulletin on April 13, 1943, briefly informed the world of the discovery of mass grave pits in the forest. There was little additional information, as the German investigation was still in its early stages. Pursuit of the truth was secondary to turning the investigation into a theatrical display for the global community.

The Germans spread this news in an effort to undermine alliances with the Soviet government. The alliance between the "Big Three" during the Second World War was one of unease and borne from a sense of necessity. The Stalinist regime did not hold the same values as either the American or British governments. With the German invasion into Soviet territory, the British sought a military alliance with their former rival in order to defeat Hitler. The basis for this decision was purely strategic, an effort to increase pressure on the Nazi forces, now that the conflict was a two-front war.[141] During the period of negotiation as to the terms of alliance, tensions became apparent between the British and Soviet diplomats. While the British focused on the task-at-hand, the Soviets used this outreach to reimagine the post-world balance of powers. Given the

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[138] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, ed. Anna M. Cienciala and Natalia S. Lebedeva (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 215, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[139] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 215.

[140] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 215.

[141] Lothar Kettenacker, "The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the Problem of Germany, 1941-1945," *Journal of Contemporary History* 17 (1982): 436.

urgency of defeating the Nazis, Stalin's demand that the 1941 Soviet borders (which included parts of Eastern Poland) obtain international recognition, though not preferred by the Allies, received consideration nonetheless.[142]

Across the ocean, the Americans had even more difficulty entering into an alliance with the Soviets. The United States officially recognized the Soviet Union in 1933, but a lingering animosity remained. This lack of trust influenced the U.S. foreign policy with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), making any attempt at a military alliance more difficult. According to historian Lothar Ketterman, the long-term effects of such an agreement with the Soviets would "lead the United States to climb down from the Olympian heights of their ideological principles into the depths of European realities."[143] As the Chief Coordinator of British Propaganda, Bruce Lockart, noted, the American citizens were "even more anti-Russian than our own Tory die-hards."[144] The prevalence of this distrust of Russia demonstrates how any American alliance with the Soviets was one born of necessity. Allying with Soviet Russia was a strategic decision meant to bring about the defeat of Hitler. The Soviets also had their concerns with the alliance, not completely trusting in their counterparts. Their unease came from a heightened paranoia that the British in particular withheld some support so as to encourage the Germans and Soviets to destroy each other.[145] Such mutual destruction would remove two threats to Western Europe, and this thought remained in the Soviets' mind throughout the negotiation. In essence, the alliance did not have the most auspicious beginnings.

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[142] Lothar Kettenacker, "The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the Problem of Germany, 1941-1945," 442.

[143] Lothar Kettenacker, "The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the Problem of Germany, 1941-1945," 441.

[144] Lothar Kettenacker, "The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the Problem of Germany, 1941-1945," 448.

[145] Lothar Kettenacker, "The Anglo-Soviet Alliance and the Problem of Germany, 1941-1945," 438.

The Nazis recognized tensions between the Allies and hoped to use the Katyń massacre to their advantage. While they knew it was unlikely they could separate the Americans and British, there was room to maximize the rifts with the Soviets. Their hope was that, when presented with undeniable evidence that the Soviets massacred Polish officers, the British and Americans would sever ties with the Soviets. They based this assumption on the 1929 Geneva Convention, which established standards for the treatment of POWs, including sanitary housing conditions and consistent access to religious services.[146] Along with these rights, the Convention prohibited the executions of POWs without a trial and notification to a protecting power—which the Russians did not do before carrying out the massacre.[147] Since the Russians were not signatories of the 1929 Geneva Convention, they did not technically violate this predominant international law.[148] Despite this technicality, the wide acceptance of the standards set out in this convention put the Soviets in a difficult position if the world discovered their actions. Pressure from the international community to denounce such a massacre could lead allies to question their connections to Soviet Russia. The Polish government-in-exile, comprised of many prominent Polish politicians and military officials, established itself in the friendly city of London. With the close proximity to the Polish leadership,

[146] "Part III: Captivity. Section II: Prisoners of War Camps. Chapter 1: Instillation of Camps-Article 10," and "Chapter 4: Intellectual and Moral Needs of Prisoners of War-Article 16," Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, July 27, 1929, Geneva, Treaties, States Parties and Commentaries, International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed December 14, 2020, https://ihl- databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?documentId =77CB9983BE01D004C12563CD002D6B3E&action=OpenDocument. [hereinafter cited as Geneva 1929].

[147] "Part III: Captivity. Section V: Relations Between Prisoners of War the Authorities. Chapter 3: Penal Sanctions with Regard to Prisoners of War III: Judicial Proceedings," Articles 60, 65, and 66, Geneva 1929.; A "protecting power" is a neutral power (country or organization) selected during a conflict by another power to serve as their representative in dealings with an enemy power. The enemy power also recognizes this protecting power as a legitimate power. In this situation, Russia would have to notify a country selected by Poland of the decision to execute/put a Polish POW on trial, and this country/power would then relay this information to Poland.

[148] Convention relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War, July 27, 1929, Geneva, Treaties, States Parties and Commentaries, International Committee of the Red Cross, accessed November 18, 2020, https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/applic/ihl/ihl.nsf/Treaty.xsp?action=openDocument&documentId=0BDEDDD046FDEBA9C125 63CD002D69B1.

the Germans expected the British would support the Poles, and the U.S. would jump at the chance to abandon the Soviets.[149] Yet in order for this plan to succeed, the Germans needed to form a compelling case that left no room for doubt that the Soviets perpetrated this massacre. If unsuccessful, the Germans would remain in a two-front war against strategically united enemies. That alliance meant an almost certain defeat for the Nazis, and this sense of urgency motivated their propaganda efforts.

The German government furthered their propagandist agenda by calling upon impartial international bodies to conduct independent examinations of the evidence. Both the Poles and the Germans requested that the International Red Cross (IRC) lead an investigation on April 17.[150] The IRC responded that they would only investigate if asked by all the parties involved, in this case, Soviet Russia, Germany, and Poland. Soviet Russia made their vehement opposition to this request clear by severing diplomatic ties with the Polish government-in-exile, leaving the Germans scrambling to find a secondary agency they could use.[151] They settled on the International Medical Commission, granting them absolute freedom in examining the graves and bodies as they saw fit and writing an independent final report.[152] In addition, the Germans welcomed a Polish delegation made up of representatives of the clergy, writers, the consul, and members of the Polish Red Cross.[153]

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[149] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 215.

[150] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 215.

[151] International Medical Commission, "Chapter VII: Report of the International Medical Commission, Section 1: Official communiqué, Results of autopsies and forensic medical examinations," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 130.

[152] François Naville, "Chapter VII: Report of the International Medical Commission, Section 4. Report of a Swiss Professor, Francois Naville, of January, 1947, Conditions of Work," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 136.

[153] "Chapter IX: Stories from the Scene of the Crime, Section 1. First Polish 'Delegation' organised by the Germans," and "Chapter IX: Stories from the Scene of the Crime, Section 2. Part played by the Polish Red Cross in

While these Polish individuals confirmed the credibility of the German hypothesis within Polish circles, the Germans sought to develop additional international support. They invited journalists from eight "neutral countries" (Sweden, Switzerland, Spain, Holland, Belgium, Hungary, Norway and Serbia) to tour the Katyń graves, accompanied by a representative of the Reich Press Department and the Secretary of the Foreign Office.[154] Though these journalists appeared independent, the German government invited them strategically. The Nazis either occupied or had close governmental ties to six of the countries.[155] Inviting journalists was simply another carefully calculated component of maximizing propaganda related to the massacre. Though these individuals had some freedom to wander the site, these German representatives accompanied them for much of their visit, acting to step in and assist them with making any connections between the grave site and the Soviet forces.

Nazi propaganda blamed Jewish-Bolsheviks for the massacre of Polish officers. Midway through April 1943, a startling discovery challenged this narrative. Polish writer Joseph Mackiewicz recollected that moments after the uncovering of Janina Lewandowska's body, "all the journalists took off their hats though they had not thought to accord that homage to the thousands of murdered men. The Russian prisoners employed at the digging also stopped their work and peered curiously into the grave…A flutter of excitement broke out amongst the journalists, but the Germans remained silent in blank astonishment."[156] The reactions of surprise

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the exhumations," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 175-166.

[154] Chapter IX: Stories from the Scene of the Crime, Section 3. Journalists of neutral countries in Katyn," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 178.

[155] Krystyna Piórkowska, "Starting the Newscycle – Journalists and Poles," *Researching Katyn- Coded English Letters* (blog), April 10, 2013, http://researchingkatyn.blogspot.com/2013/04/starting-newscycle-journalists-and-poles.html.

[156] Joseph Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders*, 128.

from those gathered in the Katyń forest reflects internalized gender expectations relating to military service. Poles, Russians, and Germans witnessed this uncovering, all aware that the victims were Polish, and all shocked to see a woman's body in the graves. Their surprise only intensified when they saw that she wore an officer's uniform.

Hoping that a successful propaganda campaign around the discovery of these mass graves could result in fracturing the Allies' already-tenuous relationship with Soviet Russia, the Germans feared the discovery of a woman's body would undermine and/or discredit their assertions about the Soviet role. As observer Joseph Mackiewicz explained, the German forces present

> were taken aback and extremely worried by the discovery of a woman's body in the Katyn graves…They were afraid that the utter improbability of a female body being found in a mass grave supposed to contain the bodies of Polish officers, without any clue to how it got there, would cast new doubts and undermine the authority of their version of the discoveries, which until now had seemed to fit the facts so wonderfully. They would have to issue a commentary which they were unable to supply.[157]

The Germans needed to present overwhelmingly credible evidence of Soviet transgressions to have any chance of driving a wedge between the United States, Great Britain, and Soviet Russia. A woman's presence in a mass grave of officers seemed so far-fetched that the Germans feared it would weaken their case. If these mass graves only held Polish citizens, the Germans could use her presence as an example of the ruthlessness of the Soviet executioners. However, having already labeled it as an officer's grave, the Germans only expected male bodies, since few women served in active military roles during the early stages of the war. Convinced that this evaluation was correct, the Germans present at the grave sites feared Lewandowska's body was evidence of tampered graves. Rather than believe that Polish women were members of military services, the

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[157] Joseph Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders,* 128.

Germans clung to preconceived notions. Lewandowska's body threatened their version of events and necessitated a coverup by the German forces in Katyń.

Fearing the press would not believe their propaganda after the discovery of this body, Mackiewicz recalled that, "one of [the Germans] broke away from the group and hurried to the field telephone in a neighboring hut. That evening they tried to turn the discovery into a mere bagatelle and draw the attention of the correspondents to other things."[158] The immediate actions taken by the Germans reveals how concerning this discovery was. In downplaying the discovery and shifting attention, the Germans shaped Lewandowska's legacy for the next fifty-four years. The only people who knew about the discovery of Lewandowska's body were the journalists, the Germans, and the forensic scientists. As many of the reporters belonged to countries with some affiliation to Germany, the Nazis could easily convince them to drop the story if it threatened German stature.

The neutral states, such as Switzerland, chose to wait until after German newspapers shared their articles. This deference allowed the Swiss to weigh their observations against the German press releases. It is unclear why exactly the Swiss journalist did not publish his article immediately upon his return from the graves, though historian Krystyna Piórkowska indicates that there was an additional conflict between the journalist and the editors about the timing of publication.[159] The editors appeared to want to wait until the Germans began sharing news before releasing any journalistic content. In addition, the threat of retaliation for disagreeing with the country presiding over the investigation was certainly a factor in this decision. This sentiment against speaking out

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[158] Joseph Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders,* 128.

[159] Krystyna Piórkowska, "Starting the Newscycle – Journalists and Poles."

about the massacre lingered into the 1980s, as the Soviet influence over post-war Poland silenced any discussions of Katyń in the media.[160]

Thus, Lewandowska did not receive any attention from the press, and her body simply became known as a "pilot corpse" in official reports—a description devoid of any reference to sex.[161] Found near the top of one mass grave, where the bodies had a mummified quality due to properties of the soil, Lewandowska's body was fairly easy to recognize as female.[162] This classification gave the outward impression that her body was no different from the rest. The only way to know a female body was present in the graves was to have first-hand experience viewing the body. The title of "pilot corpse" was vague enough to conceal the most discreditable detail to their hypothesis, the body's sex. When listed on an exhumation record, this classification would not merit a second glance, helping to conceal the body from other curious eyes. As such, the Germans were able to downplay the discovery.

The Germans also avoided answering the difficult questions about the presence of her body among the graves. They believed that she was not a military officer and thus needed to suppress knowledge of her presence. If the Germans knew that Polish women participated in the military from the beginning of the conflict, her discovery would not have been an issue. Their panicked response indicates the widespread belief that women were not members, much less officers, of the Polish military. Soviet women had served in military roles throughout the Second World War, but

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[160] Łukasz Zalesiński, "Metal Plane," *Polska Zbrojna*, April 2020 Special Edition, https://zbrojni.blob.core.windows.net/pzdata2/TinyMceFiles/jednodniowka_katyn_04_2020_ang.pdf, accessed December 19, 2020, 5.

[161] Carolyn Kirby, "The Remarkable Life & Death of Janina Lewandowska: Or, 22,891 men and 1 woman," *Blog*, December 28, 2019, https://www.carolynkirby.com/post/the-daring-life-and-remarkable-death-of-janina-lewandowskaor-or-22-891-men-and-1-woman.; Joseph Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders,* 128.

[162] International Medical Commission, "Chapter VII: Report of the International Medical Commission, Section 1: Official communiqué, Results of autopsies and forensic medical examinations," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents*, 129.

the Germans did not expect the same with Polish women. They knew that Polish feminine identity did not easily translate into military participation. This knowledge contributed to the initial panic that this mass grave did not fit their hypothesis and led to efforts to conceal the discovery.

The finding of these graves horrified the Poles, who spent years trying to locate the thousands of missing Polish POWs now recognized as victims of a Soviet-perpetrated massacre. Between 1941 and 1943, the Polish Government-in-Exile used their re-established diplomatic relationship with the Soviets to seek answers on the whereabouts of the prisoners known to have been in the Kozielsk, Starobielsk, and Oshtokav POW camps.[163] In November of 1941, the Polish ambassador to Moscow, Stanisław Kot, met with Soviet leader Josef Stalin who told Kot clearly that he did not know where the prisoners war were, and that, "they have escaped…to Manchuria."[164] Stalin's response set the tone for the following two years, though his attempts to prevent the Poles from learning about the deportations and executions of these officers wore away at Polish patience. Frustration with the Soviet government built throughout 1941 and 1942 as the war continued and the approximately 5,000 of Polish POWs remained "lost". Tensions between the countries reached their peak with the German discovery of the graves, culminating in the breaking-off of diplomatic relations in April 1943.[165] The Poles' request that the International Red Cross investigate the massacre inspired the Soviets' retaliatory action. Their theatrical indignation did not distract the Poles, who grew increasingly frustrated with their one-time allies. They expected that with their new military alliance, the Soviets would release all previously captured POWs to help fight in the war against Hitler. Between the German evidence and their underlying

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[163] George Sanford, "The Katyn Massacre and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1941-43," *Journal of Contemporary History* 41, no. 1 (2006): 96, https://doi.org/10.1177/0022009406058676.

[164] George Sanford, "The Katyn Massacre and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1941-43," 102.

[165] George Sanford, "The Katyn Massacre and Polish-Soviet Relations, 1941-43," 107.

mistrust of the Soviets, the Poles readily held the Soviets responsible, and expected their allies would do the same.

The Nazi propaganda was ultimately unsuccessful in driving a wedge between the Allied Forces, despite the frustration of the Polish government-in-exile. Both United States President Franklin D. Roosevelt (FDR) and British Prime Minister Winston Churchill agreed that despite the fact the Soviets likely committed the massacre, their alliance was essential to victory over Nazi Germany. Churchill forwarded a report to Roosevelt on the Katyń massacre by Sir Owen O'Malley, British Ambassador to the Polish government-in-exile. This mutual exchange of information pertaining to the massacre indicates that these men worked to respond in a productive manner. Though they did not address the massacre unilaterally, each worked within their respective governments in addition to the Polish government-in-exile to reduce any blowback to a revelation that would complicate their alliance with Soviet Russia.

In this report, O'Malley indicated his belief that based on the evidence Soviets were not innocent. In the letter, he also commented on the alliance with Stalin. "In handling the publicity side of the Katyn affair," he wrote, "we have been constrained by the urgent need for cordial relations with the Soviet Government to appear to appraise the evidence with more hesitation and lenience than we should do in forming a common-sense judgement on events occurring in normal times or in the ordinary course of our private lives."[166] Maintaining friendly relations with the Soviet government was more important than soothing Polish anxieties and anger. Historian Robert Szymczak explains that comparatively, the Soviet government could do more than the Polish

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[166] Great Britain- Churchill, Winston, 1942-1943, image 66, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Secretary's File (PSF), 1933-1945, Series 3: Diplomatic Correspondance, Franklin D. Roosevelt Presedential Library & Museum, http://www.fdrlibrary.marist.edu/archives/collections/franklin/?p=collections/findingaid&id=502, accessed December 19, 2020.

government in the conflict with Nazi Germany.[167] This evaluation heavily factored into the responses of the British and American governments to the massacre. Confronted by the Polish Prime Minister about the Soviet-perpetrated atrocity, Winston Churchill notably replied, "If they are dead nothing you can do will bring them back." [168] A few days later, Churchill reiterated his commitment to prioritize war efforts over resolving the questions of the massacre to the Soviet Ambassador, stating, "We have got to beat Hitler…and this is no time for quarrels and charges."[169] The blunt nature of Churchill's response indicates the strength of his conviction that passing public judgement on the Soviets' crimes could wait.

In the United States, Roosevelt attempted to keep knowledge of the massacre quiet, preventing Admiral William Standley from investigating the Nazi claims about it.[170] Roosevelt did not engage with the Nazi propaganda surrounding the massacre in any official capacity, standing with Churchill in the decision to fight with the Soviets. Privately, Roosevelt expressed doubts that the Soviets committed the crime, believing that the Germans were responsible. However, this commentary does not seem to have quantifiably impacted his policy of non-response.[171]

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[167] Robert Szymack, "A Matter of Honor: Polonia and the Congressional Investigation of the Katyn Forest Massacre," *Polish American Studies* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 28, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20148144.

[168] Winston Churchill, *The Second World War,* vol. 4, *The Hinge of Fate, 1950* (New York: RosettaBooks, 2014), 520, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[169] Winston Churchill, *The Second World War,* vol. 4, *The Hinge of Fate, 1950,* 521.

[170] David Mayers, "The Great Patriotic War, FDR's Embassy Moscow, and Soviet—US Relations," *The International History Review* 33 no. 2 (June 2011): 312, https://www.jstor.org/stable/23032806.

[171] George H. Nash, *Freedom Betrayed: Herbert Hoover's Secret History of the Second World War and Its Aftermath,* Stanford: Hoover Institution Press, 2011, Accessed November 7, 2020, 488, ProQuest Ebook Central.; Benjamin B. Fischer, "The Katyn Controversy: Stalin's Killing Field."

Rather than accuse Stalin of perpetrating the Katyń massacre, the two powers focused on attempting to reestablish diplomatic relations between Poland and Soviet Russia. In smoothing this tension, the Allies hoped to avoid further weakening their alliance and efforts to defeat Hitler. The two feared that a diplomatic break over the Soviet role in Katyń would lead Stalin to annex Polish territory and create a new Soviet-backed Polish state. Roosevelt and Churchill privately informed the Soviet leader they would not support such a government.[172] The two also worked with the Polish government-in-exile, pressuring the Poles to rectify the split with Russia on the Soviets' terms.[173] In a roundabout manner, the American and British governments addressed the after-effects of the Katyń massacre rather than seriously investigating the crime itself. Doing so allowed them to maintain their alliance and remain dedicated to defeating Hitler. By avoiding a direct investigation, the two could plead ignorance to their respective citizens, minimizing protests and calls for action against the Soviets. The Germans tried to put pressure on the already-tenuous relationship between the Allied Powers through their propaganda efforts, but the governments instead redoubled their efforts to maintain their alliance to defeat the Nazis. Ambassador O'Malley reflected on the double-edged nature of this decision, writing that the British, "used the good name of England like the murderers used the little conifers to cover up a massacre; and in view of the immense importance of an appearance of Allied unity and of the heroic resistance of Russia to Germany, few will think that any other course would have been wise or right."[174]

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[172] George H. Nash, *Freedom Betrayed: Herbert Hoover's Secret History of the Second World War and Its Aftermath,* 619.

[173] Robert Szymack, "A Matter of Honor: Polonia and the Congressional Investigation of the Katyn Forest Massacre," 28.

[174] Great Britain- Churchill, Winston, 1942-1943, image 66, Franklin D. Roosevelt, Papers as President: The President's Secretary's File (PSF), 1933-1945.

The Soviets recaptured the Smolensk territory in September of 1943. This control marked the end of German exhumation and investigative efforts. The Soviets were eager to place blame on the Germans and thus deflect responsibility. This intention is reflected in their investigation, which did not incorporate impartial foreign validators of evidence and was far more opaque.[175] While the Germans allowed forensic experts near absolute freedom to conduct their exhumation work, the Soviets kept their experts under tight supervision.[176] By this point in the 1943 Katyń investigations, Lewandowska's body was lost. With their international standing at stake, the Soviets needed to skew any evidence they could to support their counterargument that this was a German-perpetrated massacre. This Soviet hypothesis claimed that the massacre occurred in the fall of 1941, when the Germans occupied the Smolensk territory. According to the theory, the Germans then "discovered" and revealed the mass graves to the world to bolster flagging military and political affairs in 1943.[177] Though the Soviets had little physical evidence to support their claim, the bullets used for the executions were German made. This detail was one of their strongest arguments to place blame on the Germans. The NKVD executioners had indeed used German-made Walther PPK pistols when they executed the Poles because, first, the pistols were extremely accurate, making them reliable tools for a mass killing. Second, as German-made weapons, they also provided cover, since the Soviets could simply claim the Germans used their own weapons to

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[175] Wojciech Materski, *Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment*, 226.

[176] Marian Wodziński, "Chapter X: My Five Weeks' Work at Katyn, Section 3. Katyn Forest," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 194.

[177] Special Commission for Ascertaining and Investigating the Circumstances of the Shooting of Polish Officer Prisoners by the German-Fascist Invaders in the Katyn Forest, "Chapter VIII: The Soviet Official Statement, Conclusions of the Special Commission," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 170.

kill the Poles.[178] The Germans discovered this evidence during their investigation and did not find it concerning. They believed that their ammunitions trade with the Soviets prior to the war was common knowledge and rendered this particular detail innocuous to their overall blame of the Soviets.

The Soviets turned to personal testimony in an attempt to sway foreign opinion during carefully curated visits. During these demonstrations, the Soviets used women's testimonies to further legitimate their claims. Women living in the Smolensk territory shared their stories of the early months in 1940, including details that incriminated the Germans as the perpetrators of the massacre. United States Ambassador Averell Harriman recalled that, after one young woman's testimony, those gathered "were told that 'the girls guessed without difficulty that the Germans living in the dacha were engaged in killing.'"[179] The Soviets evidently believed that using women to express certain manipulated details would be more credible. Stating that the girls "guessed" that the Germans conducted the executions instead of the Soviets gave the appearance that there was a separation between the Soviet government and the investigation. The Soviet strategy was to rely on these young women's honesty and unimpeachable sense of duty. Women were the front people of the Soviet narrative, and their version of Katyń as a German massacre relied heavily on their ability to tell this story. Whereas the Germans shied away from referencing a female's presence at Katyń, the Soviets actively incorporated feminine voices. Janina Lewandowska's body was in uniform and challenged expectations for gendered domains of participation in the life and health

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[178] Morgan Meis, "A Monument to Forgetting: How One Disaster At Katyn Helped Us To Move Past Another," 240.

[179] Averell Harriman, "U.S. Embassy Moscow Despatch No. 207, 'Investigation by Soviet Authorities of the Massacre of Polish Soldiers in the Katyn Forest, near Smolensk'," Enclosure No. 2, page 6, February 23, 1944, Series: Central Decimal Files, 1910-1963. Record Group 59. File Unit: 740.00116 European War 1939/1355 - 1396. National Archives and Records Administration, Washington, DC. NAID #6850474. https://catalog.archives.gov/id/6850474.

of a nation. The women who testified, in contrast, worked in kitchens and the home, remaining in a widely recognized space for females.

Subtle commentary on these women's testimony points to another way in which the Soviets managed to use the feminine identity to their advantage. The witnesses received introductions and phrased their commentary in a self-deprecating way. They did not want to see these killings, but due to their 'feminine curiosity,' they happened to look out the window at the moment of a Polish officer's execution (or confinement) by German forces.[180] The Soviets exploited a pervasive belief that women were curious to a fault to build veracity for their stories. These women did not actively spy on the Germans to record each individual failure or crime and were not exaggerating any details. What they saw stuck with them, leaving them with a certainty of German guilt. They had no stake in whether it was a Soviet or German crime, and only sought to share their experience with the visitors. Thus, the Soviets hoped to strengthen the credibility of their version of the Katyń massacre.

The highly curated testimonies were not as effective as the Soviets hoped, coming across as too "staged" to the visiting Spanish, Polish, Czech, and American parties.[181] The American ambassador specifically criticized the testimony as "glib."[182] The Poles in particular were skeptical, and allies such as Britain and the United States agreed that the Soviet-supported narrative seemed weak. Despite privately agreeing, the United Kingdom and United States were slow to explicitly condemn the Soviets, prioritizing their alliance over the massacre. The British in

[180] Averell Harriman, "U.S. Embassy Moscow Despatch No. 207, 'Investigation by Soviet Authorities of the Massacre of Polish Soldiers in the Katyn Forest, near Smolensk'," Enclosure No. 2, page 6.

[181] Averell Harriman, "U.S. Embassy Moscow Despatch No. 207, 'Investigation by Soviet Authorities of the Massacre of Polish Soldiers in the Katyn Forest, near Smolensk'," Enclosure No. 1, page 4.

[182] Averell Harriman, "U.S. Embassy Moscow Despatch No. 207, 'Investigation by Soviet Authorities of the Massacre of Polish Soldiers in the Katyn Forest, near Smolensk'," Enclosure No. 1, page 5.

particular simply stated that the best defense of Soviet innocence was producing the Polish soldiers known to be held in the POW camps.[183] Since victims' personal effects were in the graves, it quickly became apparent that these prisoners were the same ones known to be in Soviet POW camps. Losing ground, the Soviets found themselves in a situation where much of Europe believed they were guilty, even without a direct admission. The Soviet efforts to misconstrue evidence and employ direct testimony failed. Their efforts to play on traditional gendered expectations could not effectively distract the world from the truth. Exhumation of the bodies and identification efforts continued relatively undisturbed throughout the rest of the war.

[183] Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians, *Katyn: British reactions to the Katyn Massacre, 1943-2003* (UK: Foreign and Commonwealth Office Historians, 2003), vi.

CONCLUSION:

RETURNED TO HER HOMELAND

It was time. Lying on his deathbed in 1997, the famed Polish forensic scientist, Professor Boleslaw Popielski felt confident he could reveal his secret. For the past fifty-two years, he had kept six skulls of Katyń victims hidden from the prying eyes of Soviet and Polish secret police.[184] Fearing punishment for discussing the massacre and manipulation of the facts by the Soviets, Popielski remained silent.[185] The only other person who knew about their existence was his long-deceased predecessor in the University of Wrocław Department of Forensic Science, Gerhard Buhtz.[186] Though the existence of these skulls was shocking enough, Popielski had one last tantalizing detail to share: one of these remains was a woman's.[187] The efforts of both the German and Soviet exhumations to hide the existence of a female victim in the Katyń graves slowly unraveled with this revelation. After neglect in newspaper reports and intentional misclassification in official documents, the process of formal identification of the only female body found in the graves could begin.[188]

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[184] Krzysztof Łagojda, "Second Lieutenant Janina Antonina Lewandowska – the woman pilot," Burial Mound, Katyn: Pro Memoria, accessed December 19, 2020, https://katynpromemoria.pl/wersja-alternatywna/barrow/?lang=en.

[185] Łukasz Zalesiński, "Metal Plane," *Polska Zbrojna*, April 2020 Special Edition, https://zbrojni.blob.core.windows.net/pzdata2/TinyMceFiles/jednodniowka_katyn_04_2020_ang.pdf, accessed December 19, 2020, 5.

[186] Krzysztof Łagojda, "Second Lieutenant Janina Antonina Lewandowska – the woman pilot."

[187] Łukasz Zalesiński, "Metal Plane," 5.

[188] Carolyn Kirby, "The Remarkable Life & Death of Janina Lewandowska: Or, 22,891 men and 1 woman," *Blog*, December 28, 2019, https://www.carolynkirby.com/post/the-daring-life-and-remarkable-death-of-

After the initial discovery and identification of Lewandowska's body in the mass graves in 1943, little is known about what happened to it next. Testimony from fellow prisoners in the Kozielsk camp referenced a female POW, thought to be Lewandowska, though no concrete evidence existed for public confirmation of this supposition. Sparse details of her life were also available through these testimonies, but they do not appear to have had much impact on the overall narrative of Katyń. If anything, these brief biographies cemented the public's understanding of her story- simple details of her family and presence in the camp.

Despite the absence of official confirmation that Janina Lewandowska perished at Katyń, her family knew this was a strong possibility. Fellow internees, such as Dr. Wacław Mucho, transferred from the Kozielsk camp prior to its liquidation, stated they encountered Lewandowska in the camp.[189] Coupled with the fact that she did not return home after the war, it became increasingly obvious that she was another victim of the massacre. When news finally broke of the female body in 1951, the strength of this supposition increased. Though there were no exhumation details that formally identified the body as Lewandowska's, a process of deduction led the family to this conclusion. Individuals following news of the massacre arrived at the same conclusion, though nobody could confirm whether the body found in the mass graves belonged to Lewandowska. Without this information, the Polish nation did not begin the formal memorialization process for the young officer.

The appearance of her skull in 1997, when Boleslaw Popielski made his revelation, was the first physical evidence of her death in the massacre. By 2005, improved technology allowed

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janina-lewandowskaor-or-22-891-men-and-1-woman.; Joseph Mackiewicz, *The Katyn Wood Murders,* (London: Hollis and Carter, 1951), 128.

[189] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The only woman in the Kozielsk camp," in *The Crime of Katyn: Facts and Documents,* 5th ed. (London: Polish Cultural Foundation, 1989), 33.

for the next team that analyzed the skulls to confirm it was hers using a super projection method.[190] Super projection is a forensic science process whereby a picture of the deceased is combined with forensic markers on the body or skull to match and super-impose key genetic features to determine whether or not it is a match.[191] Since the skull was separate from the rest of her body, those working on the identification process had less to work with. They had to wait for developments in the field, such as super projection, that would allow them to make an identification from just the skull, which would have lengthened the final confirmation of her identity.

Lewandowska's final burial in November 2005 included military honors.[192] Present at the burial was Henryk Gulbinowicz, the Cardinal of Wrocław, who stated that, "Janina Lewandowska, lieutenant of the Polish Army pilot, the only woman prisoner of war murdered in Katyń, you have returned to your homeland".[193] The cardinal's words were consistent with the Polish narrative of Katyń, in particular the idea of these soldiers returning home after a long "exile" in hostile territory. Although identified as the only female victim, the process of the burial remained the same, her military honors consistent with any veteran's funeral. The distinct lack of press surrounding the burial indicates that the family expressed a desire to keep the proceedings to themselves.

In the years after her burial, Janina Lewandowska continued to receive posthumous awards and military promotions. In 2009, Polish President Lech Kaczyński ordered the promotion of all

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[190] Krzysztof Łagojda, "Second Lieutenant Janina Antonina Lewandowska – the woman pilot."

[191] Sergio Damas, Oscar Cordón, Oscar Ibáñez, Jose Santamaría, Inmaculada Alemán, Miguel Botella, and Fernando Navarro, "Forensic identification by computer-aided craniofacial superimposition: a survey," *ACM Computing Surveys* 43, no. 4 (October 2011): 5, https://doi.org/10.1145/1978802.1978806.

[192] Krzysztof Łagojda, "Second Lieutenant Janina Antonina Lewandowska – the woman pilot."

[193] Henryk Gulbinowicz, quoted in "Janina Lewandowska (1908-1940): The Pilot Murdered in Katyn," National Heritage Board of Poland, *Poland. A Country of Remarkable Women* (Fundacja Dla Dziedzictwa, 2018), 31.

the victims in the Katyń massacre to honor their memory.[194] For Lewandowska, this meant her title became that of Lieutenant. Again, she did not receive any special commendation, remaining just another victim of the massacre. This honor was important and further solidified the massacre in the Polish mindset, but it did not have any special bearing on Lewandowska's legacy. On a local level, however, Lewandowska received the "Ad Perpetuam Rei Memoriam" posthumous commemorative medal from the Wielkopolskie Voivodship.[195] The Wielkopolskie Voivodship is a province in Western Poland including cities like Kalisz, Konin, and the one where she learned to fly, Poznan. This award, which roughly translates to an award for "perpetual memory," indicates how a local province paid homage to her sacrifice. Lewandowska's active participation in the Poznan aviation clubs contributed to her service in the Polish Air Force. This particular honor recognizes the specific, formative connection between the province and the Second Lieutenant.

The story of Katyń intersects with the Matka Polka, though this connection does not hinge on Janina Lewandowska's presence. Instead, it indicates a national model of mourning, returning to the partition period and martyrdom of Polish children. The Katyń Memorial at Wrocław features a wounded, almost certainly dying, victim of Katyń cradled in a woman's arms. While the man's body is emaciated and contorted, the woman sits upright, gazing imploringly at the angel of death, who is posed feet away on an elevated slab. As Vanessa Fredericks describes this motherly figure, "she has prepared her son for this fate. Her subservient position suggests that she is succumbing to her own role in the narrative, and that is to accept that her sacrifice is contributing to a broader

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[194] Patryk Wawrzyński, "The Remembrance of the Katyń Massacre and the President Lech Kaczyński's concept of Polish-Russian Relations [2005-2010]," *Polish Political Science Yearbook,* no. 41 (2012): 513, http://dx.doi.org/10.15804/ppsy2012028.

[195] "Janina Lewandowska," Wielkopolski Urząd Wojewódzki w Poznaniu, accessed December 18, 2020, https://www.poznan.uw.gov.pl/panteon-wielkopolanki/janina-lewandowska.

narrative that gives meaning to her suffering."[196] The Polish mother depicted by Adam Mickiewicz in his 1831 poem thus connects to the maternal figure at this particular memorial. The mother is seen, quite literally, to be "Gaz[ing] on the sword that cleaves her living heart" as she symbolically holds all the victims of the Katyń massacre in her arms and looks at the angel of death above her.[197] This memorial, constructed and unveiled to the public around the turn of the century, is evidence that the Polish mother is still linked with the massacre at Katyń. The lingering connections between the two demonstrate how Polish citizens understand the terribly destructive events of Katyń. For the Poles, the victims of Katyń became martyrs in their efforts to defend their nation.

In 1999, the Polish government issued a pair of stamps which include "reproductions of icons. The first, a Madonna and child, is inscribed 'Our Lady of Victories: Kozelsk'… The second is inscribed 'Our Lady of Katyn.'"[198] The first design, "Our Lady of Victories," contains much more religious imagery than the second. Mary, the Queen of Heaven as well as Poland, has a certain exhaustion in her eyes. The dark hues, as well as the half-closed eyes themselves, indicate that despite her crown, this honor did not come easily. This detail speaks to the exhaustion many Polish mothers also attest to in their daily lives. It also refers to the impact of having a child or loved one martyred. [199] Mickiewicz's poem alludes to this physical and emotional fatigue, where he described "the cruel blow thy breast shall feel."[200] The second, more widely known illustration

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[196] Vanessa Fredericks, "Decapitating and Debraining the Nation: Katyn and the Body Politics of Martyrdom," КУЛТУРА / Culture 6, no. 13 (2016): 74, http://cultcenter.net/journals/index.php/culture/article/view/245.

[197] Adam Mickiewicz, "To a Polish Mother," *The Slavonic Review* 3, no. 7 (1924): 68.

[198] Robin Elliott, "Bearing Philatelic Witness: Victims of Stalinism on Stamps," *Smithsonian Contributions to History and Technology* 56, (2012): 62, https://doi.org/10.5479/si.19486006.56.

[199] Agnieszka Imbierowicz, "The Polish Mother on the Defensive," *Journal of Education Culture and Society* no. 1 (2012): 141.

[200] Adam Mickiewicz, "To a Polish Mother," 68.

of “Our Lady of Katyń,” features imagery which mirrors that of the Wrocław memorial, with a venerated mother kissing the bleeding head of a Katyń victim. The pain shown in this stamp is a more overt sadness, and though no tears of the mother are seen in this portrait, it is not difficult to imagine “a woman's tears, soon spent” over such a body, which symbolically represents all of the Katyń victims.[201]

The omission of a larger display of appreciation and honor in Lewandowska’s name is striking, considering the connection between the Matka Polka and memory of Katyń. This may be due to the fact that the Polish Matka Polka narrative is unable to categorize Lewandowska. She served in the military, and though she fulfilled many of the same responsibilities as the Matka Polka at home, this blending of cultural expectations confuses a rigid classification. As Australian philosopher Vanessa Fredericks notes on the subject of Polish women’s relation to greater Polish society, “they are (re)producers of the narrative and not the producers of action.”[202] Lewandowska was an active participant in religious life and bolstered patriotic sentiments in the Kozielsk camp. She remained true to the spirit of the Matka Polka and its saintly model, the Virgin Mary. Yet despite Lewandowska’s work and sacrifice for her nation, she simultaneously challenged Polish gender expectation.

While the Poles struggled with her story, the large Polish American population embraced her multi-faceted legacy. Polish American investment in discovering the truth of the Katyń massacre began at the Nuremberg War Crime Trials in 1945. Tasked with prosecuting “crimes against humanity,” Soviet Russia attempted to blame the Germans conclusively for the massacre.

[201] Adam Mickiewicz, “To a Polish Mother,” 68.

[202] Vanessa Fredericks, “Decapitating and Debraining the Nation: Katyn and the Body Politics of Martyrdom,” 74.

Despite British and American backlash, the Soviets proceeded.[203] The Soviet's case against the Germans was weak, relying on purely Soviet-produced testimony and evidence analysis.[204] The ensuing leading questions and combative testimony produced by both the German and Soviet legal teams caused the final Nuremberg verdicts to avoid condemning either party. The lack of a conclusive investigation led by a fully impartial party remained a miscarriage of justice in the minds of American Poles for several years. Against a backdrop of rising Cold War hostilities in 1950, a young Timothy Sheehan decided to run as the Republican Congressional candidate in a heavily Polish American district in Chicago.[205] During his campaign, he consulted with prominent Polish American leadership, learning that a "pillar of bitterness" within this community was the Katyń massacre.[206] His campaign promise to lead a Congressional investigation became reality during his first session. On June 26, 1951, he introduced a resolution that called for an investigation into the massacre.[207] This Congressional inquiry concluded that the Soviets were responsible. Though this was not necessarily new to anyone acquainted with the details of the massacre, the lengthy research process solidified Katyń as a central part of Polish American consciousness.

This extolling of Lewandowska's virtues is present in American artistic pieces that address her legacy. Eugenez Komorowski's 1974 since-discredited memoir of Katyń, *Night Never Ending,* attempted to capitalize on the lack of primary accounts of the massacre. Despite offering little

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[203] J. K. Zawodny, *Death In The Forest; The Story Of The Katyn Forest Massacre* (San Francisco: Verdun Press, 2015) 51, accessed November 17, 2020, ProQuest Ebook Central.

[204] J. K. Zawodny, *Death In The Forest; The Story Of The Katyn Forest Massacre,* 52.

[205] Robert Szymack, "A Matter of Honor: Polonia and the Congressional Investigation of the Katyn Forest Massacre," *Polish American Studies* 41, no. 1 (Spring 1984): 47, https://www.jstor.org/stable/20148144.

[206] Robert Szymack, "A Matter of Honor: Polonia and the Congressional Investigation of the Katyn Forest Massacre,"47.

[207] Robert Szymack, "A Matter of Honor: Polonia and the Congressional Investigation of the Katyn Forest Massacre," 48.

historical value, the text inspired poet Kendall Merriam to compose a series of poems about Janina Lewandowska in 1981.[208] His aptly titled book, *Hymn for Janina Lewandowska,* is an interpretation of her camp experiences. Referencing her rejection of Soviet re-education efforts, he writes, "no one could convert/a flier/close to eagles/no one/could convert you/…/a natural noblewoman/you'd never be a lackey/and give away your friends/away/to be killed/you would never be/a traitor."[209] Directly addressing Lewandowska, Merriam seeks to construct a pedestal and lift her from obscurity. His reference to the eagle is both a comment on her pilot skills and a subtle nod to the Polish coat of arms. Merriam is an American poet, and his praises of Lewandowska are distinct from the attention she receives in Poland.[210] Elsewhere in the text, Merriam employs Madonna allusions to inspire further rage within the reader over Lewandowska's death. Her execution, he writes, "cannot be redeemed by admission/…/nor can it be redeemed/by even the freedom of Poland/for they have killed you Madonna/and that can never be redeemed."[211] Merriam draws on the strong Marian connection to the Polish community to emphasize his sense of Lewandowska's loss, with her death as significant as a holy icon's. There is no evidence to suggest similar sentiments persist in Poland, indicating Merriam's perspective is a uniquely American one. This American approach to honoring her memory is blunter than the Polish model, which quietly thanks Lewandowska without the same showiness.

This vein of literary memorialization for Lewandowska is evident in physical memorials of the massacre in the United States. The National Katyń Memorial in Baltimore, Maryland,

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[208] Uilleam Blacker, "The Wood Comes to Dunisane Hill: Representations of the Katyn Massacre in Polish Literature," *Central Europe* 10, no. 2 (2012): 118, https://doi.org/10.1179/1479096312Z.0000000005.

[209] Kendall Merriam, *Hymn to Janina Lewandowska* (The Dog Ear Press, 1981), 19.

[210] Though a recently released fictionalized biography of her exists, that text attempts to imagine her life, rather than simply describe a sense of her righteousness for an audience as Merriam does.

[211] Kendall Merriam, *Hymn to Janina Lewandowska*, 26.

incorporated Lewandowska into the structure. In 1994, the group announced their plan to build a 46-foot-tall bronze memorial to the massacre in Baltimore.[212] The Polish American sculptor, Andrzej Pitynski, designed the memorial. The memorial has the shape of a flame with the figures of various historical Poles emerging from the tongues of fire, including three Polish kings in addition to Polish Americans that fought under George Washington. At the base of the flame are three Polish soldiers, representing the thousands of Polish victims in the Katyń massacre.[213] Their placement at the base frames these victims as inciting a rebirth of Poland, one that continues to recall the sacrifices of those that came before. This model of memory is not new but is updated to reflect one of the most recent tragedies for Poland.

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[212] Sun Staff Writer, "46-ft. bronze sculpture planned for Inner Harbor," The Sun (Baltimore, MD), June 10, 1994: 1A. NewsBank: Access World News – Historical and Current.

[213] "About the Monument," *National Katyń Memorial Foundation,* accessed December 18, 2020, http://www.katynbaltimore.org/monument.

Figure 2. Rendition of three Polish officers at the Katyń Memorial in Baltimore.

One of these three depicted soldiers is Janina Lewandowska, the only female figure on the memorial.[214] This detail of the memorial echoes the actual massacre, as she was also the only female officer killed at Katyń. Her inclusion in this national memorial is distinct from the Smolensk memorial, where she is remembered no differently than other victims. Not only is her figure a part of the Baltimore memorial, but on the descriptive plaque, she receives a brief biography. "The one female figure is Lieutenant Jadwiga Lewandowska, a Polish Air Force pilot,"

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[214] "About the Monument," *National Katyń Memorial Foundation.;* Carla Tonaszewski, *Three Polish Officers,* 2003, National Katyn Memorial, Baltimore, MA, http://www.katynbaltimore.org/monument.

it reads, "She is the only known woman to share the fate of her brother officers."[215] Though the substance of this description does not call attention to her specific contributions to camp life, her presence on the memorial indicates a distinct respect for her by Polish Americans.

The memorial was designed in 1994, three years before Boleslaw Popielski's revelation of the Katyń skulls, and eight years before official confirmation that the female body in Katyń belonged to Lewandowska.[216] Even without express confirmation that it was Lewandowska, the memorial was technically accurate due to the widespread knowledge of the presence of a female body in the mass graves. The desire to include the female soldier points to this Polish American sense of attachment to this figure as a sort of symbol of heroism and exceptionality. Despite the lack of confirmed information about this woman, inclusion of her likeness served as a reminder to viewers that the intense patriotism of these soldiers was not confined to any particular gender.

Speaking at the dedication of the memorial in 2000, United States Senator Barbara Mikulski noted that, "Janina continues to serve as a model of what is best about Polish women and culture. Her story of faith, patriotism, loyalty and courage, even under the most horrendous conditions, will continue to inspire generations of Poles and especially, Polish women."[217] Each of the values Mikulski lists is an attribute of the Matka Polka: loyalty to family and country, demonstrated by instilling children with a strong sense of patriotism, and courage in recognizing that their children may become martyrs.

The distinct differences between Polish and American memorializations of Janina Lewandowska in Poland and the United States raises the question: which befits Lewandowska's

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[215] "About the Monument," *National Katyń Memorial Foundation.*

[216] Sun Staff Writer, "46-ft. bronze sculpture planned for Inner Harbor," The Sun.

[217] Barbara Mikulski, "Janina Dowbor-Musnicki Lewandowska," Polonia Today Online, accessed December 18, 2020*,* https://www.katyn.org.au/mikulski.html.

view of her relationship to her country? Her dedication to her fellow Polish POWs, seen through her requesting transfer with them and conversational walks with them in Kozielsk, validates the Polish method.[218] Lewandowska did not seek honors or attention; she saw herself as a Pole, just like the others in these POW camps. She affected change on an individual level, her interactions with other prisoners the backbone of her efforts to protect and encourage patriotic sentiments. Quiet memorials of her impact seem the most aligned with her personal philosophy as demonstrated by her actions within the Kozielsk camp. And so, her legacy in Poland remains summarized in one brief sentence: she was the only female POW executed in the Soviet-perpetrated Katyń massacre. No mention is made to honors, promotions, or impact on her fellow soldiers. It is left for the curious few to investigate and determine her impact in Poland, quietly appreciating a figure whose patriotic efforts were simple, but of consequence to those around her.

[218] "Chapter II: Three Camps: Kozielsk, Starobielsk, Ostashkov, Section 2. Personal Memoirs of Survivors, The only woman in the Kozielsk camp," 33.

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