

# RUSSIAN METHODS OF INTERROGATING

## CAPTURED PERSONNEL

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### WORLD WAR II

By  
KERMIT G. STEWART  
Major, Infantry, United States Army

RUSSIAN METHODS  
OF  
INTERROGATING CAPTURED PERSONNEL  
WORLD WAR II

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Major, (Inf) GSC

#### W A R N I N G

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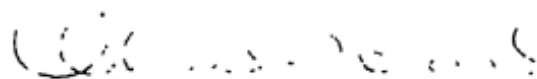
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F O R E W O R D

The Office of the Chief of Military History has undertaken the preparation of various special studies needed in the Army School System and for staff reference. Such projects were initiated more than three years ago when a canvass of general and special staff sections of the Army resulted in requests for studies on a wide variety of subjects. In many cases the need for such studies was found to be greatest in matters pertaining to foreign military methods. This study is intended to provide the Army with information on Russian interrogation methods in a condensed and readily usable form. It has been made at the request of the Assistant Chief of Staff, G-2, GSUSA.

A considerable volume of material is available for research on Soviet methods of interrogation. The Russians, however, are extremely secretive, and there are many gaps in our knowledge of their operations and methods, particularly at the higher levels of the Soviet governmental and military structure. It is felt that this study will fill in some of the missing pieces of the Soviet puzzle. If it stimulates further investigation to gain yet more complete knowledge of Russian methods, the continuing value of the study will be enhanced.

  
 ORLANDO WARD  
 Major General, USA  
 Chief, Military History

Washington, D. C.  
 September 1951

S E C R E T

SECRET

iii

in Germany as a result of the complete suppression of the Communist party by the Nazis. While it can be assumed that the Soviet General Staff was aware of the experience gained in the field of prisoner interrogation during World War I and the Civil and the Russo-Polish Wars that followed, it is apparent that the Soviet high command failed to adequately train lower headquarters in known techniques and procedures. The great purges which took place from 1937 to 1939 particularly affected personnel in the intelligence services and on the General Staff of the Red Army. The majority was arrested, imprisoned and executed; others fled the country. Years of work in intelligence was thereby cancelled out, and the new intelligence service at the beginning of the war was weak and ineffective. The same was true, and for the same reason, of military leadership in general. Not until battle-tested leaders began to replace the incompetents in late 1941 did morale and discipline improve in the Red Army. Subsequent improvement of the Red Army as a fighting machine was paralleled by an improvement in interrogation techniques and by an increasing emphasis on the importance of interrogation as a means of gathering information.

B. Soviet Instructions Issued in 1940

A set of instructions concerning the collection, interrogation, and evacuation of prisoners (or deserters) was issued by the

Deputy Peoples' Commander of Defense in February 1940. The Germans found a copy of these instructions in Poland in the captured files of a Russian tank unit. This copy was one which had been issued by the Fourth (Soviet) Army to its subordinate units in September 1940, and it can be assumed, therefore, that the instructions were in force during the first stage of the conflict between Germany and Russia. The fact that the Germans captured a second copy of these instructions which had been received by the Trans-Caucasus Military District on 25 December 1941 supports this conclusion. Subsequent revisions of these instructions and specific orders regarding interrogation are available only in brief or fragmentary form, and most of the changes must be surmised on the basis of known changes in organization and procedure. Many of the 1940 instructions apparently remained in force, at least in principle, throughout the war, particularly as regards evacuation.

The 1940 instructions consisted of forty-nine articles followed by an appendix containing prisoner-report forms and questionnaires designed to serve as guides to interrogators in a variety of typical combat situations. In the discussion of these instructions which follows it will be noted that the procedures are similar to those practiced by the armed forces of most modern nations and that the directions given are very

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-139-

general in nature. It will also be noted that none of the instructions prescribes procedures contrary to accepted rules of warfare, even though the Soviet Union was not a party to the Geneva (Prisoner of War) Convention of 1929. These instructions are not, of course, concerned with the treatment of a prisoner subsequent to his evacuation from the combat zone nor with his repatriation at the close of hostilities.

The first three articles of the instructions are subtitled "The Importance of Taking Prisoners." Articles 4 through 13 appear under the subtitle "Procedure for Collecting and Evacuating Prisoners"; articles 14 through 41 under "Interrogation of Prisoners"; and the last eight articles under "Evacuation of Prisoners."

#### The Importance of Taking Prisoners

At the beginning of the instructions it was emphasized that prisoners are a valuable source of intelligence to all levels of command and staff. A well-organized system of interrogation and of exploiting captured documents and materiel, it was stated, can lead to the formulation of accurate data on the strength, organization, and intentions of the enemy. Troops were urged to capture prisoners as frequently as possible since the taking of a prisoner is a clue, in itself, to the location of a certain enemy unit in an area; the taking of many prisoners can result in confirming the

presence of anything from a small unit to an army group.

#### Procedure for Collecting and Evacuating Prisoners

Immediately after capture, prisoners were to be disarmed and thoroughly searched for documents and concealed weapons. Unarmed soldiers were to conduct the search under the supervision of a commanding officer while armed soldiers kept loaded weapons pointed at the prisoners who stood with their hands raised. Officers and members of "military-bourgeois" organizations (such as SS units) were to be given an especially thorough search. Types of documents to be confiscated included orders, maps, official and personal correspondence, army manuals, diaries, notebooks, identification papers, and newspapers.

Article 13 of the instructions stated that "all military personnel . . . must be generous to an enemy prisoner and render any assistance in order to save his life." In keeping with this general rule, Soviet military personnel was specifically forbidden to take from or exchange with a prisoner the latter's gas mask, personal (toilet) kit, uniform, underclothing, footwear, belt, personal belongings, and money. Collection and search of prisoners during battle was to be carried out in terrain protected from enemy fire.

Following the search, prisoners, were to be subdivided into six groups: (1) officers, (2) noncommissioned officers and members

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-141-

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Deputy Peoples' Commander of Defense in February 1940.<sup>5</sup> The Germans found a copy of these instructions in Poland in the captured files of a Russian tank unit. This copy was one which had been issued by the Fourth (Soviet) Army to its subordinate units in September 1940, and it can be assumed, therefore, that the instructions were in force during the first stage of the conflict between Germany and Russia. The fact that the Germans captured a second copy of these instructions which had been received by the Trans-Caucasus Military District on 25 December 1941 supports this conclusion.<sup>6</sup> Subsequent revisions of these

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1941 supports this conclusion. Subsequent revisions of these instructions and specific orders regarding interrogation are available only in brief or fragmentary form, and most of the changes must be surmised on the basis of known changes in organization and procedure. Many of the 1940 instructions apparently remained in force, at least in principle, throughout the war, particularly as regards evacuation.

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100 / 338

from boots and underwear to watches and eyeglasses. Far from being free from "strain or tension," interrogation periods were characterized by table pounding, pistol-point threats, and physical brutality when prisoners refused to answer questions satisfactorily. Red Army interrogators also contradicted prisoners frequently during interrogations and confronted them with conflicting data, practices which had been specifically forbidden in the 1940 instructions.

While the killing of prisoners was tolerated by lower echelon commanders, it would appear that the Soviet high command disapproved from the beginning. A directive (No. 1798) of the Soviet Government, dated 1 July 1941, reiterated humanitarian aspects of the 1940 instructions and categorically ordered: "It is prohibited to insult and maltreat prisoners." <sup>11</sup> A general order issued in December 1941 revealed that the supreme command was dissatisfied with interrogation results, that it censured military personnel because so few prisoners ever arrived at army headquarters for interrogation and prohibited the killing of prisoners <sup>12</sup> by combat troops. An order of the VIII Cavalry Corps (Russian), dated December 1942, stated: "In compliance with the Order of the Commanding General of the Fifth Tank Army [Russian], I order that all German officers and enlisted men who surrender are to be treated well. . . . The wounded will be given medical care." <sup>13</sup>

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### TESTIMONY OF HON. WILLIAM AVERELL HARRIMAN, DIRECTOR FOR MUTUAL SECURITY

Chairman MADDEN. Mr. Harriman, will you be sworn, please? Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?

Mr. HARRIMAN. I do.

Chairman MADDEN. Please state your full name for the record.

Mr. HARRIMAN. My name is William Averell Harriman.

Chairman MADDEN. And your address, Mr. Harriman?

Mr. HARRIMAN. My address here in Washington?

Chairman MADDEN. Yes.

Mr. HARRIMAN. 1800 Foxhall Road.

Chairman MADDEN. And your business?

Mr. HARRIMAN. I am Director for Mutual Security.

EXHIBIT 24—TELEGRAM FROM UNITED STATES EMBASSY, MOSCOW, JANUARY 25, 1944

[Telegram]

MOSCOW, January 25, 1944.

SECRETARY OF STATE,  
*Washington.*

(For President and Secretary—strictly confidential.)

Member of Embassy staff and my daughter have returned from trip Smolensk with British and American correspondents. While there they were shown evidence being collected by special commission to investigate German shooting of captured Polish officers in Katyn Forest close to Smolensk.

None of party was able to judge scientific evidence of autopsies which were performed in their presence. Moreover, they were not permitted to make independent investigations except for formal questioning of few witnesses made available. Correspondents filed reports telling what they saw without expressing opinions, but for some reason censor has held up these stories. The general evidence and testimony are inconclusive, but Kathleen and Embassy staff member believe probability massacre perpetrated by Germans.

Appears Soviets conducting very detailed examination each body by autopsy and by examination clothing, remaining personal effects, and papers. Evidence which made greatest impression to strengthen Russian case was:

- (One) Most soldiers exhumed to date were enlisted men rather than officers, as Germans claimed.
- (Two) Methodical method of execution, each having been killed by one shot at base of skull.
- (Three) Dates of papers exhibited from November 1940 to June 1941.
- (Four) Testimony by witnesses re unsuccessful attempt to evacuate Poles at time of German breakthrough to Smolensk and re Poles engaged road work in area for Russians and Germans in 1941.

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facts concerning the case; is that correct? Not once were you communicated with for information. They did not care what happened to those officers; did they?

Mr. HARRIMAN. I cannot say they did not care, but it is a fact they did not ask me to do it. I assume they did not think I had any means of finding out how it occurred.

Mr. O'KONSKI. If the answer is not that they did not care, the other answer is that they were so afraid they might learn the truth about who murdered them that again they might get afraid of that great big thing; that Joe Stalin might get mad at us and make a separate peace with Hitler.

Mr. HARRIMAN. I don't think that would be the case at all. I never saw any evidence of that. There was a constant effort on the part of the United States Government to protect the interests of the Poles insofar as it was possible to do so.

**TESTIMONY OF JOHN F. MELBY, ALEXANDRIA, VA.**

Chairman MADDEN. Will you be sworn, please?  
Do you solemnly swear to tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth, so help you God?  
Mr. MELBY. I do.

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2150 THE KATYN FOREST MASSACRE

Chairman MADDEN. You may proceed, Mr. Machrowicz. Mr. MACHROWICZ. You are John Melby?

Mr. MELBY. John F. Melby; yes.

Mr. MACHROWICZ. What is your address?

Mr. MELBY. 123 Prince Street, Alexandria, Va.

Mr. MACHROWICZ. And in January and February 1944, you were in Moscow as the Third Secretary of the United States Embassy, were you not?

Mr. MELBY. That is correct.

Mr. MACHROWICZ. You filed a report of your investigation of the Katyn massacre, did you?

Mr. MELBY. That is correct.

Mr. MACHROWICZ. And you were present, were you not, at the same time that Miss Harriman was?

Mr. MELBY. That is right.

Mr. MACHROWICZ. And your report also had the conclusion that the Germans were responsible; is that right?

Mr. MELBY. That it was a fairly convincing case.

Mr. MACHROWICZ. I do not think you used the word "fairly" there.

Mr. MELBY. Well, "convincing."

Mr. MACHROWICZ. I would like to point out to you and ask you whether or not you did not include this in your report:

THE KATYN FOREST MASSACRE 2151

Then you add one very brief sentence:

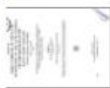
\* \* \* On balance, however, and despite loopholes, the Russian case is convincing.

now, can you tell us how that last sentence could be put in there in view of all the statements which you, yourself, put in just preceding that which, of course, created doubt as to the veracity of the Russian story.

Mr. MELBY. As I think you suggested there, I was not 100 percent convinced, by any means. I think it should also be noted that I had

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He said, "George, this is entirely German propaganda and a German plot. I am absolutely convinced the Russians did not do this."  
 I said, "Mr. President, I think this evidence overwhelming."  
 Mr. MITCHELL. When was this?  
 Mr. EARLE. The President recalled me for consultation in May of 1944. Now, this was a year after this had happened, but this evidence, conclusive evidence, had never been given to me before. It had been given to me, I think, about February that year, and I wasn't called for consultation—I wanted to present them personally to the President—I wasn't called for consultation until May of 1944.  
 These were the President's words. He said:  
 George, you have been worried about Russia ever since 1942. Now—he said—

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WASHINGTON, D. C., November 5, 1952.

MR. ALAN CRANSTON,  
12370 Hilltop, Los Altos, Calif.

DEAR ALAN: I have but a hazy recollection of the facts concerning an OWI news release on the Katyn Forest massacre, but I do recall that a release was prepared by me in cooperation with Adam Kulikowski.

Our source at that time, I believe, was the News Digest published in England. The Nazis were charged with the crime as far as I can remember. The story gave some details how the Polish Army officers were all shot in the nape of the neck, a method practiced by Nazi executioners.

A copy of the release could be located in the Archives Building, or at least traced from there to its final depository, for upon completion of OWI activities the files of the Foreign Language Division, including copies of all releases, were packed, marked, and addressed for delivery to the National Archives Building.

Perhaps the Select Committee To Investigate the Katyn Forest Massacre is in possession of the release in question, or at least a published copy thereof.

While in Washington, should you find time available, visit us.

With best wishes,

PAUL STURMAN.

how you could write this whole report and then draw a conclusion that the Germans did this—did you feel that that possibly was the answer your superiors in the State Department and Washington would prefer?

Mr. MELBY. No; I had no reason to have any idea as to what kind of answer they would want.

Mr. PUCINSKI. You had no reason?

Mr. MELBY. No.

Mr. PUCINSKI. Nevertheless, you knew that there were very close relations at that time between the United States and the Soviet Union?

Mr. MELBY. Yes, sir.

Mr. PUCINSKI. And did you feel that you might be somewhat putting yourself in an unfavorable light if you drew your conclusions on the basis of your reasoning and the rest of your report, and concluded the Soviets did this?

Mr. MELBY. No, sir; not at all.

Mr. PUCINSKI. There was no such fear in your mind?

Mr. MELBY. No, sir; not at all.

Mr. DONDERO. How long were you there, Mr. Melby?

Mr. MELBY. We arrived early one morning, 7 or 8 o'clock, and were there in the area until about 2 a. m. the following morning.

Mr. PUCINSKI. And you are certain that nobody asked you to voice a conclusion on your visit to Katyn?

Mr. MELBY. Absolutely certain.

Chairman MADDEN. How long were you in Russia before you went to Katyn?

Mr. MELBY. I arrived there in May 1943.

Chairman MADDEN. How many months before?

Mr. MELBY. It would have been about 7 months.

Chairman MADDEN. How long were you there after you went to Katyn?

Mr. MELBY. Until April 1945, a little over a year more.

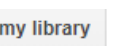
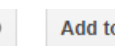
Chairman MADDEN. Are there any further questions?

(There was no response.)

Chairman MADDEN. That is all, Mr. Melby. Thank you for appearing as a witness.

Mr. MELBY. Thank you, sir.

Chairman MADDEN. The committee will recess now to convene to-



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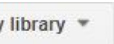
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[About this book](#)**REPORT WRITTEN BY MRS. KATHLEEN HARRIMAN MORTIMER AFTER VISITING KATYN  
IN JANUARY 1944**

[Enclosure No. 2 to Despatch No. 207 dated February 23, 1944, from American Embassy,  
Moscow]

On January 23, 1944 members of the foreign press were taken to Smolensk to get first hand the evidence compiled by the Commission on the Katyn incident.

The party was shown the graves in the Katyn Forest and witnessed post mortems of the corpses. As no member was in a position to evaluate the scientific evidence given, it had to be accepted at its face value.

The testimonial evidence provided by the Commission and witnesses was minute in detail and by American standards petty. We were expected to accept the statements of the high ranking Soviet officials as true, because they said it was true.

Despite this it is my opinion that the Poles were murdered by the Germans. The most convincing evidence to uphold this was the methodical manner in which the job was done, something the Commission thought not sufficiently important to stress. They were more interested in the medical evidence as conclusive proof and the minute circumstantial evidence surrounding the crime.

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gation and to prove scientifically that the bodies found were buried in the Spring of 1940.

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Mr. O'KONSKI. That sounds logical.

I asked that question, because the first time your name did come up, that you went on this mission, the average criticism immediately was, "Well, why would so young a girl be picked for so responsible a job?" I am glad to get the answer to that question, because it was a very serious mission that you went on. That clarifies it. Coming back to my original comment, that as I read your reasoning I cannot agree with your conclusion in your report, that prompts me to ask this question: Did you arrive at your conclusion independently and entirely on your own reasoning, entirely on your own thinking? Did anybody exert any pressure or any force or any hint to you at all in arriving at your conclusion? Mrs. MORTIMER. No.

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Mr. O'KONSKI. That sounds logical.

## SCOPE AND CONTENT NOTE

Paul Sturman's papers have been divided into two series and arranged in reverse chronological order by subject. The collection was largely unarranged when received by the Eisenhower Library, therefore undated items have been left in their original file location. Also, there is a large quantity of foreign language materials within the collection which have been arranged chronologically in so far as it was possible to determine dates. File folders are titled by subject, with annotations added which highlight the general subject matter of the file as well as particularly interesting documents.

Paul Sturman served in the Foreign Language Division of the Office of War (OWI) during World War II. The Foreign Language Division was a division of the News Bureau within the Domestic Operations Branch of the OWI. Alan Cranston, who later served as a prominent senator from California, was chief of the Foreign Language Division from 1942-1944. Sturman monitored activities of domestic foreign language groups primarily from Czechoslovakia, Hungary, Poland, and Yugoslavia. Sturman's papers document his activities from approximately

<https://www.eisenhowerlibrary.gov/sites/default/files/finding-aids/pdf/sturman-paul-papers.pdf>

Walter Lippmann, the influential columnist, believed that the United States was deliberately and dangerously humiliating the Soviet Union. The American delegates, Lippmann believed, had fallen under the sway of the hard-line anti-Soviet views of Ambassador Harriman. When Harriman told a news conference in San Francisco that "our objectives and the Kremlin's objectives are irreconcilable," Lippmann walked out. He was disturbed by

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**Stanley Meisler**, the author of two other books, was a foreign and diplomatic correspondent for the *Los Angeles Times* for three decades. He was also deputy director of the Peace Corps's Office of Evaluation and Research in the mid-1960s. Meisler, who lives in Washington, D.C., has written for *Foreign Affairs*, *Foreign Policy*, the *Atlantic*, the *Nation*, and *Smithsonian*, and periodically posts news commentaries on his Web site.

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By Wojciech Materski

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Katyn: A Crime Without Punishment

By Wojciech Materski

(Katyn: A Crime without Punishment, Yale University Press, Head Office of State Archives in Poland, Federal Archival Agency of Russia, Wojciech Materski, p. 321)

The sizes of the entry wounds on the occipital bone permit the conclusion that two calibers of firearms were used in the executions: in the overwhelming majority of cases, smaller than 8-mm, that is, 7.65-mm or less; in a lesser number, larger than 8-mm, that is, 9-mm.